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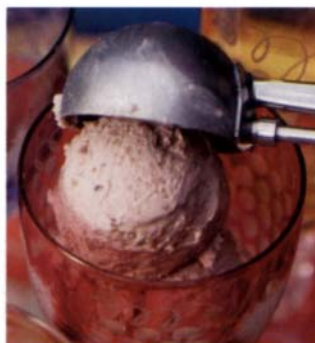
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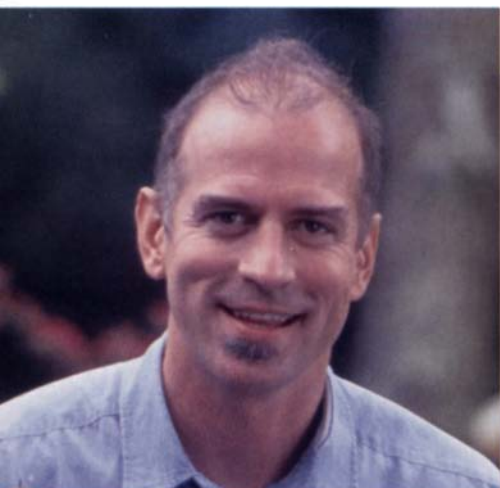
Try them roasted, tucked inside a tart, in ice cream, as a filling for bar cookies, or plain and simple

On the cover: *Blueberry Shortcakes*, p. 44.

Cover photo, Scott Phillips. These pages: top left series, Laurie Smith; bottom left, Ben Fink; above, Mark Thomas; below, Mark Ferri.



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Steve Johnson

("Brochettes," p. 28) is the chef-owner of The Blue Room in Cambridge, Massachusetts. He was also an integral force in founding the Boston chapter of Chefs Collaborative 2000, a national network of chef-activists who believe, among other things, that

good food starts with locally grown ingredients. When he isn't at his restaurant or walking the fields of a nearby farm, Steve is at his beach home in southern Massachusetts, where he spends time boating, fishing, swimming, gardening, and grilling with friends.

John Ash ("Grain Salads," p. 34) is the culinary director of Fetzer Vineyards, the founder of John Ash & Co. restaurant, host of his own television show and radio spot, author of the award-winning *From the Earth to the Table: John Ash's Wine Country Cuisine*, and the teacher spotted everywhere from the Disney Institute to the Culinary Institute of America at Hyde Park. He's developing his next book, *John Ash's Pantry*.

Paul Kirk ("Ribs," p. 40) barbecues so much, and has won so many barbecue contests, including seven world championships, that his fellow competitors have branded him the "Baron of Barbecue." A chef for Sodexo/Marriott Corp., Paul preaches what he practices in barbecue classes around the country. He lives with his wife and three children in Shawnee Mission, Kansas, and is at work on a second barbecue book. His first is *Paul Kirk's Championship Barbecue Sauces* (Harvard Common Press, 1998).

On any given Saturday in summer, you might spot **Susan G. Purdy** ("Shortcakes," p. 44) out picking wild berries in Litchfield County, Connecticut, where she lives. She might also be at home developing a new cake recipe, or perhaps she's in someone else's home, trying to sell it (she's also a realtor). Her book, *Have Your Cake & Eat It, Too* (William Morrow, 1993) won a Julia Child Cookbook award, and her most recent book, *Let Them Eat Cake* (William Morrow, 1997), was nominated for a James Beard award. She's now working on a cookbook of traditional but time-saving baking recipes for the family.

Amy Albert ("Mixing Tools," p. 46) is an associate editor for *Fine Cooking*. When she's not editing, writing, or travelling for *Fine Cooking*, she's likely making collages and assemblages, poking around at flea markets, or swimming laps. Amy has worked as a bilingual press liaison, wine waiter, cook, singer, and massage therapist.

Although **Norman Van Aken** ("Mojos," p. 50) grew up in Chicago, his culinary heart belongs to south Florida, where he took his first cooking job at an all-night barbecue joint in Key West in 1973. A little more than 20 years and a lot of hard-knocks cooking lessons later, Norman became chef and co-owner of his own restaurant in



Miami, Norman's, which has been packed every night since it opened. For his boldly flavored "New World" cuisine, Norman has won the Robert Mondavi Award for Culinary Excellence and the James Beard Award for Best Chef in the American Southeast. His third book, *Norman's New World Cuisine*, was nominated for a 1998 IACP cookbook award.

Martha Holmberg ("A Cooking Vacation," p. 54) began her career in cooking in 1984, by taking a job for \$5 an hour as a pantry chef at a small Denver restaurant. "I spent half the day washing lettuce, but I loved every minute of it—I've never looked back." She went from Denver to Paris to

attend La Varenne cooking school. After graduating in 1988, she worked as a private chef, caterer, cooking teacher, cooking school director, and cookbook editor, but she's at last found her dream job, as editor of *Fine Cooking*.

Anne Willan ("Twice-Baked Soufflés," p. 58) is the founder and director of La Varenne Cooking School, with programs in France, Italy, and the United States. She's the author of numerous cookbooks, including *La Varenne Pratique*, *Look & Cook* (a 17-volume series that is the basis of a PBS series, *Look & Cook with Anne Willan*), and *In & Out of the Kitchen in 15 Minutes or Less*. Her latest book, *Anne Willan's Cook It Right* (Reader's Digest, 1997) was reviewed in *Fine Cooking* #27.



A Chinese scholar turned Chinese cook, **Barbara Tropp** ("Secrets to Stir-Fried Food," p. 63) was chef-owner of China Moon in San Francisco for eleven years. Recently liberated from restaurant ownership, Barbara now spends her time teaching, consulting, and leading culinary tours to Asia. The author of *The Modern Art of Chinese Cooking* (William Morrow, 1982) and *China Moon Cookbook* (Workman, 1992), Barbara lives in Napa Valley.

Deborah Madison ("Fresh Fig Desserts," p. 66) was a founding chef of Greens restaurant in San Francisco. She's now a cook and cookbook writer. Her most recent book, *Vegetarian Cooking for Everyone* (Broadway Books, 1997) has won both a James Beard award and the IACP Cookbook of the Year Award. Deborah's previous book, *The Savory Way*, has just been reissued in paperback by Broadway Books. She lives in Santa Fe.



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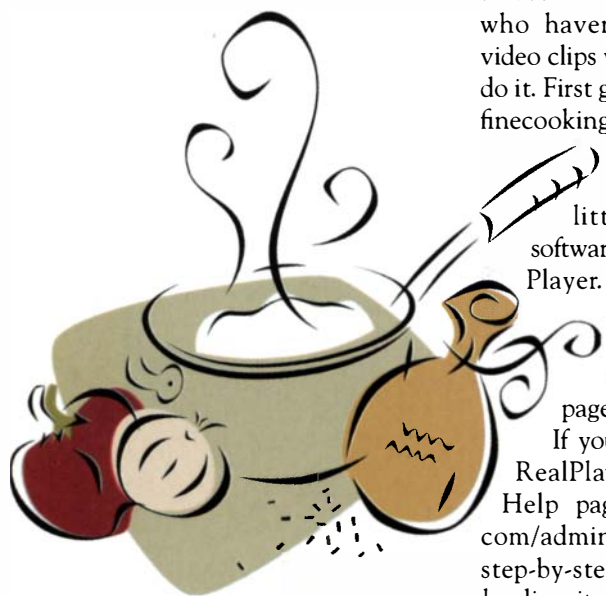
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Success with risotto, thanks to your web site

I just read my first issue of your magazine and enjoyed it. Looked up your web site, and lo and behold: a video follow-up to your article on risotto. I have tried unsuccessfully to cook risotto many times and look forward to trying published and video directions. What a great idea. The Real-Video helps tremendously to understand [the technique]. Rest assured I'll subscribe.

—Terry Dougall, via e-mail

Editors' reply: We're glad that you found chef Alan Tardi's risotto demonstration so useful. For those readers who haven't sampled our video clips yet, here's how to do it. First go to our web site: finecooking.com.



Learn to make risotto from our web site.

To watch the video, you need a little piece of free software called the Real-Player. Your computer may already have it; if so, just go to any of our video pages, click, and enjoy. If you don't have the RealPlayer, stop by our Help page (finecooking.com/admin/help.htm) for a step-by-step guide to downloading it. Please note that while our videos are great, we're at the leading edge of this technology, so the image looks a bit like TV in the early '50s (the audio is perfect).

Now showing: making fruit fools, roasts on the grill, sushi, risotto, crisp-coated chicken breasts, and spinach soufflés.

The courage to make lemon curd

I had avoided making lemon curd through the years be-

cause it sounded too easy to mess up. I followed the recipe for the curd and the Scottish shortbread in *Fine Cooking* #26, and my company was delighted. A friend said it was good on gingerbread, so I tried it a few days later. Using the gingerbread recipe made with applesauce (from the new *Joy of Cooking*) I added one ingredient not called for: 3 tablespoons of chopped candied ginger. Equally as good as the shortbread but not as fattening, it was a taste sensation when you bit into the ginger.

Thank you for the best cooking magazine on the market today. I've dropped subscriptions to all other food publications. You're the best.

—Jeanne Freshwater, via e-mail

Spatula angle

Thank you, Abby Dodge. The angled wooden spatula (*Fine Cooking* #26, p. 16) is also a favorite tool of mine. In my kitchen, I have all kinds of tools, but I consider the angled wooden spatula my number-one tool, even though I have many other wooden spatulas. I use it always, especially with my Teflon-lined pans. Every kitchen should have one.

—Ralph Picarello, Paramus, NJ

A stiff knife is a safe knife

The knife article in *Fine Cooking* #24 left out one attribute most important in a kitchen knife, and that is lateral stiffness. A flexible knife blade is dangerous because it can twist while cutting, changing direction unpredictably and possibly cutting the user. While a flexible

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LETTERS

blade can be appropriate for some purposes, such as filleting a fish, a general-purpose kitchen knife should be as stiff as possible.

To test a knife, hold the handle as normal with the cutting edge of the blade parallel to a hard surface and press down firmly on the tip. A good knife will deflect no more than 1/2 to 3/4 inch—any more than that and the knife should be avoided. Bread knives that pass this test are extremely rare—Lamson's nine-inch serrated bread knife is a notable well-crafted exception.

—Davis Yetman,
Newton, MA

Cheers for no-nonsense wine tips

Thanks to Amy Albert for the wine shopping tips. I agree, who wants to ruin a good wine by finding cigar-box nuances? I'd like to take one of this sort of taster-writer into a chicken coop and hear about the nuances found there!

I also agree that rarely is one fortunate enough to find a wine salesperson who really knows much about what he's selling, and even more rare to find one whose palate resonates with mine.

My habit when shopping for wine is to buy two bottles of the same wine and try each with a different meal. This helps me decide whether to buy in case lots or not.

—Felix Marti, via e-mail

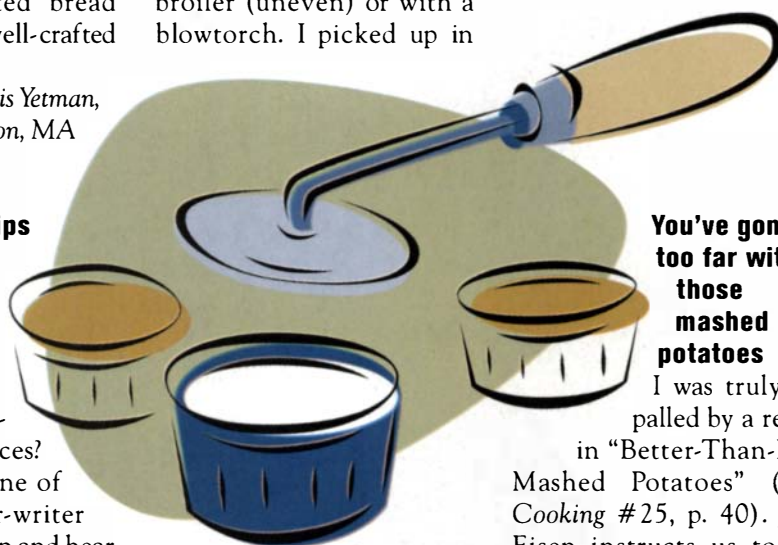
Perfect gadget for crème brûlée

I read with delight Joanne Chang's article on French custards (*Fine Cooking* #25). She includes two methods for caramelizing the sugar for *crème brûlée*: either under the broiler (uneven) or with a blowtorch. I picked up in

and cool the custard, sprinkle sugar on top, heat the disk on top of the flame or element of the stove until very hot, and then gently place it on top of the sugar. The sizzle and dark golden result is spectacular. The disk, called a salamander, fits perfectly over the wide, shallow earthenware dishes which came with the implement.

I always read *Fine Cooking* cover to cover.

—Christina Bates,
Ottawa, Ontario



You've gone too far with those mashed potatoes

I was truly appalled by a recipe in "Better-Than-Ever Mashed Potatoes" (*Fine Cooking* #25, p. 40). Josh Eisen instructs us to use 14 tablespoons of butter for two pounds of potatoes. You do realize that's only about four potatoes? Are you kidding? Shame on you.

Would you serve these to your friends and family or to your enemies? I don't expect *Fine Cooking* to be a low-fat

magazine, but don't you think that 42 grams of fat per serving is a little steep? The United States is already the land of the fat, and we all should have some social responsibility to try to limit the fat in the American diet.

I think that Josh Eisen should be whipped with his potato masher for that one.

—Mary Flaum, Ridgefield, CT

Editors' reply: Yes, indeed, 42 grams of fat per serving is pretty steep—definitely not for everyday fare, but perhaps a delicious special-occasion recipe? But before anyone mashes author Josh Eisen, please note that he has also included three other mashed potato recipes, one of which uses no butter, just olive oil—which is fat, too, but much less saturated. The fat grams for these equally delicious variations are 18, 17, and 27 grams per serving.

Mash them like grandma did

I must take exception to Josh Eisen's article on mashed potatoes. My grandmother (who lived to be 107 and was very avant-garde) made her mashed potatoes by beating them with a wooden spoon. I remember them as being really exceptional.

—Jim Schmidt,
Navasota, TX ♦

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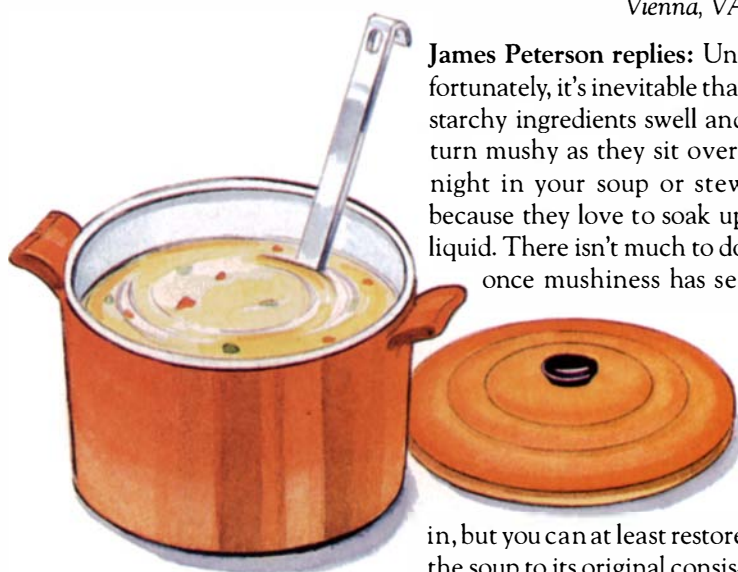
Have a question of general interest about cooking? Send it to *Fine Cooking*, PO Box 5506, Newtown, CT 06470-5506, and we'll find a cooking professional with the answer.

How to avoid mushy soup

When I make bean soups that have pasta or rice, the soup usually thickens too much, and the pasta or rice gets mushy (I usually make these soups ahead of time and then reheat them). Is there some sort of chef's secret for this problem?

—Deborah Newcomb, Vienna, VA

James Peterson replies: Unfortunately, it's inevitable that starchy ingredients swell and turn mushy as they sit overnight in your soup or stew because they love to soak up liquid. There isn't much to do once mushiness has set



To keep pasta or rice from getting too soft in a soup, add the starch just before serving.

in, but you can at least restore the soup to its original consistency by adding a little water or broth.

The secret is to prevent the rice or pasta from getting mushy in the first place. Since you like to make soup ahead of time, try adding the starch to the soup the same day you're serving it, simmering the rice or pasta just long enough to cook it through.

If you don't want to prepare rice at the last minute (pasta is easier since it cooks so quickly), cook it ahead of time in a separate pan, reserve it in the refrigerator, and stir it into your soup just before serving. If you're making soup to serve over several days, add the rice or pasta only to the amount of soup you're reheating.

James Peterson, a contributing editor to Fine Cooking, is the

author of Splendid Soups (Bantam, 1993).

Hominy, grits, and cornmeal—what's the difference?

What is hominy? Does it have anything to do with cornmeal and grits?

—Frances Yizdat, Chicago, IL

John Martin Taylor replies: Hominy, cornmeal, and grits are all corn products, but they've each been processed differently.

Think of the corn kernel as having three main parts: the hull or skin; the hard, starchy endosperm; and the tiny germ, which contains the oil. Hominy, also called posole, is whole corn kernels that have had their hulls and germs removed, either chemically or mechanically. Nowadays, hominy is used by cooks primarily to make the soup or stew known as posole.

Whereas hominy is whole kernels, cornmeal and grits are ground. In their purest, whole-grain form, cornmeal and grits are just ground dried corn kernels, with nothing added, nothing removed. Grits are simply a coarser grind than the cornmeal. I sell both, along with the more finely ground corn flour, which I dust on fish and vegetables before frying.

Commercially milled cornmeal and grits are another matter. They've been stripped of their hull and germ to prolong their shelf life (the oil in the germ turns rancid quickly once the corn has been ground).

Whole-grain, stone-ground corn products have much

more flavor and are worth seeking out, whether you'll use them for polenta, cornbread, or just a bowl of breakfast grits. Make sure your supplier keeps all whole-grain ground corn products refrigerated or else marks them with the milling date, which should be within the last two weeks. *John Martin Taylor is a cook, a writer, and the owner of Hop-pin' John's, a culinary bookstore in Charleston, South Carolina.*

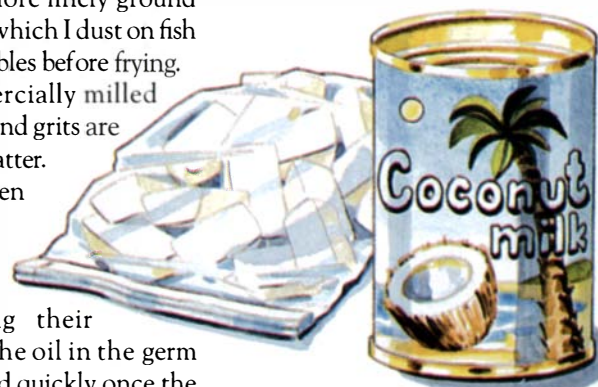
How to save leftover coconut milk

Can I freeze coconut milk? Some of my favorite recipes call for only a few tablespoons, and it spoils quickly in the refrigerator.

—Nancy Kohl, Lynn, MA

Su-Mei Yu replies: There are a few ways to store extra canned unsweetened coconut milk. First, transfer the leftover milk to a covered glass jar. It will keep in the refrigerator for up to a week.

Frozen coconut milk stays good for a month. Freeze the leftovers in an ice-cube tray. When the cubes are frozen, put them in a plastic zip-top bag; this way, you'll have it available in small amounts.



Leftover coconut milk, frozen in an ice-cube tray, stays good for a month.

You can drop frozen coconut milk directly into a simmering soup or stew, but in most other cases, you should thaw the milk and then bring it to a quick boil to get the consistency back before using it. *Su-Mei Yu is the chef-owner of Saffron restaurant in San Diego.*

Safely adding alcohol to a hot pan

After I sear steak in a pan, I love to make a quick, simple sauce by deglazing the pan with a good Cognac. But I worry about the alcohol causing a fire. What's the safest way to do this?

—Val LoPresti,
Davenport, IA



Before deglazing with alcohol, remove the pan from the heat.

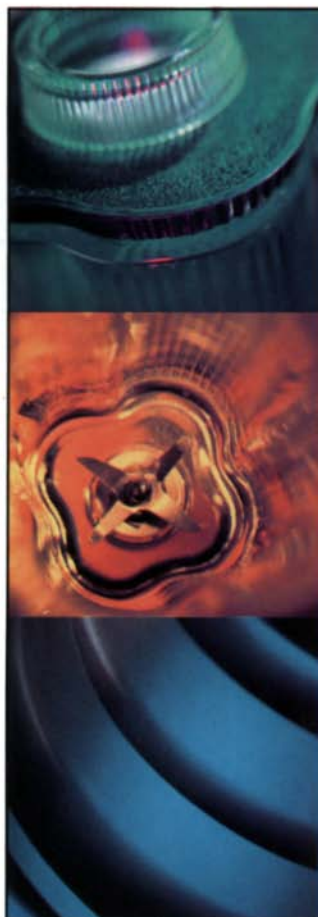
Karen Snyder-Kadish replies: Deglazing a pan with a spirit like brandy or whiskey is a wonderful way to make a great sauce. When you add the liquid to the pan, the caramelized juices loosen and

the full flavor of the meat gets incorporated into your sauce.

Because alcohol vapors are so flammable, there's always a risk of fire when deglazing. High heat increases the risk that the alcohol might suddenly ignite, so the safest method is to add the alcohol carefully and use low heat.

First remove the pan from the heat. Transfer the seared meat to another dish and pour out all but a tablespoon of fat from the pan. Pour or spoon in the Cognac, swirling the pan to help cool the alcohol. Now you can put the pan over low heat for a minute to evaporate the alcohol. There should be no fire, but if the sauce does ignite, cover the pan immediately with its lid. Finish off the sauce as you like, with herbs or other seasonings.

Karen Snyder-Kadish is the coordinator and head instructor of culinary arts at The New School's master class in cooking in New York City, where she also teaches a class in pan-to-plate sauces. ♦



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Juicy Tomatoes to Savor and Cook

If I had to name the quintessential pleasure of high summer, it would be tomatoes—fresh, ripe, and brimming with flavor. At farmers' markets, you'll see all sorts of varieties in a range of rich colors to enjoy in the kitchen and at the table, from red Roma plum tomatoes for sauces to dappled Big Rainbows for salads and sandwiches, to Yellow Pear cherry tomatoes for just eating out of hand.

From candy-sized cherries to fist-sized globes

Tomato sizes range from tiny cherries to giant beefsteaks almost the size of a grapefruit. As for shapes, you'll see smooth globes, lobed scallops, oblongs, and clusters of tiny round or pear shapes. Flavors go from the big, spicy punch that comes from the concentrated sugar-to-acid ratio of a Brandywine to more subtle creamy-smooth varieties with



Persimmon tomato is a succulent, juicy heirloom. The flavor is sweet and delicate, with a wonderfully flowery aroma. Persimmon's dense flesh has a custardy texture.



Roma plums have thick, meaty walls. The classic sauce tomato, Roma is less juicy than slicing varieties; it cooks down readily for sauces and tomato paste.

Big Rainbow is shot through with rose-red: slice it thickly and you'll see a marvelous marbled pattern. This tomato is fruity, mild, and sweet, with a custardy texture.



floral, fruity, or earthy overtones, such as a Persimmon.

Choose glossy, heavy fruit

At the market, look for plump, glossy fruit that feel heavy for their size. A ripe tomato should feel pliant but not mushy, with no soft spots or cracks. Stem calyxes, if they're still attached, should be fresh and green, never shriveled or tired-looking.

Older and heirloom varieties often ripen from the bottom (the blossom end) to the top (the shoulders), so don't be put off if the shoulders still

show a little green. If the body feels heavy, is fully colored and smooth with just a little give to it, the tomato is ripe. Don't shy away from pleated or multi-shouldered tomatoes (like Persimmon, at left), either—these irregular shapes are what make many old-fashioned varieties distinctive.

Beefsteaks, cherries, sauce tomatoes, and slicers

There's luscious flavor in every tomato variety that



Yellow Pear is a charming, petite old favorite; its clusters of sunny teardrops are hard to resist. Yellow Pears are low in acid and mild tasting. Kids love them.



Big Boy is a classic hybrid bred especially for the market and home gardens. Big Boys have delicious tomato aroma and a hearty texture—good for slicing. They're delicious in sandwiches and bread salads.

grows in summer. The hundreds of varieties can be roughly grouped into four categories.

Beefsteaks are very large, juicy tomatoes that can be either globe-shaped or lobed. They're delicious fresh-eating tomatoes, and they're great for sandwiches and grilling.

Cherry tomatoes are small (up to an inch in diameter) and they grow in clusters. They're great for snacks and salads.

Sauce tomatoes can be oblong, oval, or sausage-shaped. Sauce tomatoes earn their name because they're meatier, less juicy tomatoes well-suited to cooking down into sauces and soups.

Slicers are multipurpose, fresh-eating tomatoes, great for just about anything. Many slicers are globe-shaped, although you will run across



Sweet 100s are among the sweetest of all tomatoes, with juicy texture and beautiful deep red color. These little nuggets are beautiful in salads and great for snacks. Sweet 100s are also delicious dried.



Sungolds are fruity-tasting cherry tomatoes that are juicy, thin-skinned, and full of spicy-rich flavor. Try mixing a basketful of these with Sweet 100s for an eye-catching combination that looks and tastes like garden candy.



Red Brandywine has especially tender, meaty flesh. The flavor is full and luscious—both tart and sweet, with a spicy finish. When you find Brandywines at their peak, enjoy them soon; they don't keep well once fully ripe.



Firebirds are full of juice and aroma, with soft flesh; they're a fruity, earthy-tasting tomato with lots of substance. They're fine for eating out of hand, but use them quickly, as they're not good keepers.



White Wonder is an heirloom that's over a century old. Its mellow flavor is fruity, earthy, and mild; the flesh is soft. White Wonders vary from globes to slightly flattened fruits.



Yellow Brandywine is a heavy, thin-skinned heirloom with the same well-balanced, rich flavor as a Red Brandywine. Eat them fully ripe and sliced to show off their meaty flesh and exquisite flavor.

shouldered, irregularly shaped examples, too.

Heirlooms, old favorites, and hybrids

Heirlooms are varieties lovingly passed on by gardeners and saved for the next growing season. This process has helped maintain older varieties, especially those that grow well in a certain region or that have great flavor. Heirlooms are open-pollinated varieties that don't need human intervention to reproduce their varietal qualities. They're not in commercial production, and they're at least forty years old.

Old varieties are often old favorites or home garden varieties that were once sold

by seed companies but are often hard to find today because they're no longer in commercial production.

Hybrids are varieties that have been crossbred by hand for traits such as productivity and resistance to disease.

Storing tomatoes

While many of us were taught to store ripe tomatoes in the refrigerator, cold really mutes their sweetness and flavor. I like to keep different colored ripe tomatoes in a big bowl on my kitchen counter, where their tempting beauty shows off summer's bounty. Buy a few different kinds for a good mix of colors and flavors. If you must store tomatoes in the fridge, be sure to bring

them back to room temperature before you eat them.

A longtime cook and gardener, Renee Shepherd owns Renee's Garden, a seed company whose packets are sold at independent nurseries nationwide. ♦

More at the market

Look for more delicious signs of full-on summer at produce stands:

- ♦ **Garden lettuces** to toss into a colorful mix of tender greens.
- ♦ **Fresh herbs** to flavor potato salads, tossed salads, and to grind into pastes and rubs for pilafs, roasts, and pastas.
- ♦ **Eggplant** to grill for a pizza, a tian, or to toss into a chunky summer stew with tomatoes, chickpeas, squash, and onions.
- ♦ **Blueberries** for crisps, cobblers, fools, and pies.
- ♦ **Watermelons, cantaloupes, and honeydews** for refreshing ices, sorbets, and smoothies.
- ♦ **Peaches and plums** to eat out of hand, to tuck into fruit tarts, and to toss into fruit salads.

Nuñez de Prado is intensely fruity organic olive oil

The first time I tasted Nuñez de Prado, the Rolls Royce of Spanish olive oils, I was forever spoiled. I admired the whisper of almond in its intensely fruity, burnt-orange flavor. I splashed it lavishly on fish and pastas, and made a remarkable salad of salt cod with green olives, tomatoes, and oranges.

So when I was invited to visit Nuñez de Prado estate in the world's largest olive-oil-producing area—Andalusia, in southern Spain—I was on the next plane.

On a crisp fall day during the harvest, I was greeted by the suave Nuñez de Prado brothers and whisked to the pewter-hued olive orchards, basket around my neck, to pick by hand the rosy ripe olives that would be rushed to the family's 200-year-old mill. There, I watched my olives mingle with those of the other harvesters and then get pulverized by 300-ton granite cones. Eventually the unfiltered oil that drips naturally from the resulting crushed mash (called *flor del aceite*, or flower of the oil) would make it into square glass bottles.

Here in the U.S., look for Nuñez de Prado in specialty food stores, or order it through the mail from Zingerman's (888/636-8162). A 500ml bottle is \$25.

—Peggy Knickerbocker, author of *Olive Oil: From Tree to Table* (Chronicle, 1997)



Plenty of room for pancakes on stovetop griddle

I fell in love with my Chef's Design reversible nonstick griddle the first time I used it. Made of coated cast aluminum that's smooth on one side, ridged on the other, the griddle conducts heat impressively (the entire surface can reach 480°F). From the moment I unwrapped it (it was a wedding gift), I had fantasies of Sunday morning pancakes, cooked to perfection in batches big enough to let me eat alongside my husband. Those visions became reality, and now I use my griddle for much more, from

grilling bread to searing salmon.

On a gas range, the griddle heats in about 5 minutes (on electric burners, it takes longer). The nonstick surface needs no oil, but use wooden or plastic utensils to prevent scratching.

The Chef's Design griddle comes in one- and two-burner models (\$36, \$50) from Williams-Sonoma (800/541-2233). Or call the Wisconsin Aluminum Foundry (920/682-8627) for information.

—Sarah Jay, associate editor, *Fine Cooking*



Cyberkitchen: Shopping online

If you're looking for a new Calphalon sauté pan, a bargain bottle of wine, or even the latest cookbook from your favorite author, shop the Web. Cooks can now find more than 800 pieces of equipment, from Wüsthof-Trident knives to Le Creuset cookware, at www.acooksgallery.com. K&L Wine Merchants' excellent web site, www.klwines.com, offers a Best Buy monthly wine club with truly great values; and for cookbook lovers, www.books-for-cooks.com is the source for more than 10,000 cookbooks in 140 categories.

Events

BURGER FEST

Seymour, Wisconsin
August 1

Seymour is famous for the world's largest hamburger—5,520 pounds—and for a 2,000-pound cheeseburger on a flatbed truck that sunk into the ground after the cheese was added. Stop at the Hamburger Hall of Fame nearby to view hamburger memorabilia. Call 920/833-2765 or -2663.

SHRIMP FESTIVAL

Delcambre, Louisiana
August 12-16

Delcambre has long been a shrimping port, and the festival celebrates shrimp with sauce piquante, fried shrimp, boiled shrimp, shrimp étouffée, and shrimp po' boys. Get a taste of the entries in the cook-off, and watch the blessing of the fleet. Call 318/685-2653 or -4239.

WATERMELON FESTIVAL

Hope, Arkansas
August 13-16

Since 1926, Hope has been the home of the world's largest watermelons—up to 260 pounds. Sample slices from 22,000 watermelons, a giant fish fry, barbecue, bratwurst, and sausages. Call 501/777-3640.

MINT FESTIVAL

St. Johns, Michigan
August 14-16

Clinton County grows 400,000 pounds of spearmint and peppermint each year. At the festival, sample mint tea, ice cream, and milkshakes, chocolate mints, candy, and bottles of peppermint and spearmint oil. Tour the mint farms. Call 517/224-7248.

GREAT PEANUT BICYCLE TOUR

Emporia, Virginia
September 10-13

This bicycle tour through Virginia and North Carolina peanut country includes hearty meals each night. The focus is the Great Peanut Tour on the second day, a 13-mile ride with stops to discuss peanut farming. Call 800/449-2453.

Send December and January listings (by September 1) to *Fine Cooking*, PO Box 5506, Newtown, CT 06470-5506, or e-mail (fc@taunton.com).



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— Benjamin Franklin



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TASTED & TESTED

Scharffen Berger is intense, fruity chocolate

Chocolate lovers take note: Scharffen Berger is a name you'll want to remember. Two Americans, Robert Steinberg (a physician) and John Scharffenberger (a former winemaker) have joined forces to make European-style chocolate in small batches at a factory in South San Francisco. Using vintage machinery from Europe, they make an intensely flavored chocolate with a very high percentage of cocoa (70%—the remainder is sugar, whole bean vanilla, and a tiny amount of soy lecithin). A blend of several tropical



cocoa beans including the aromatic Venezuelan *criollo*, Scharffen Berger chocolate has an intense, long-lasting, fruity flavor and a smooth, silky texture.

When we tried the chocolate in desserts at Chez Panisse, we had to adjust our recipes to accommodate the 70% cocoa mass (Callebaut bittersweet, a chocolate we often use, is about 55% cocoa), occasionally adding extra sugar and vanilla to bring out the chocolate's sublime flavors. But it was well worth it: this chocolate makes an ordinary dessert elegant. (A 62% version will be released soon; it's slightly sweeter but still as aromatic.) A 10-ounce bar is \$9; a 3.3-pound bar is \$33. Look for Scharffen Berger at specialty stores or call 800/930-4528.

—Charlene Reis & Alan Tangren,
pastry chefs, Chez Panisse,
Berkeley, California

Events

SEAFOOD FEST

Hampton, New Hampshire
September 11–13
More than 50 restaurants offer food and drink on the boardwalk, and a panel of experts gives awards to the best restaurant dishes. Try the chowders, crab cakes, boiled lobsters, steamers, Cajun seafood, and homemade desserts. Call 603/964-7293.

CLAMFEST

Memorial Park
Essex, Massachusetts
September 12
The founders of Woodman's Restaurant became famous for inventing fried clams here in 1916. At the fest, there are fried clam strips, clam fritters, clam cakes, and steamers. Local restaurants compete for Best Chowdermaker; visitors can vote. Call 978/283-1601.

BEAN SOUP FESTIVAL

Cold Springs Grove
McClure, Pennsylvania
September 15–19
This festival began 107 years ago as a reunion of Civil War veterans. The bean soup is still made like it was then, and veterans in uniform still get a free bowl. Civil War battle re-enactments take place on even years. Call 717/658-8425.

APPLE JACK CELEBRATION

Nebraska City, Nebraska
September 19–20
You'll find apple pancakes, cider, apple pies and caramel apples here, but no applejack (the festival actually got its name from one of the founders, Jack). Contests for apple pie baking, apple peeling, and seed spitting. Call 800/514-9113.

WINE & CHILE FIESTA

Santa Fe, New Mexico
September 23–28
At the main event, wines from more than 60 world-class wineries are paired with food from 60 of Santa Fe's restaurants. Sample seminars, demonstrations by chefs, horseback rides in the desert, campfire breakfasts, and Champagne brunches. Call 505/982-8686.

The best of California by mail



Food lovers who visit northern California have long included the Oakville Grocery in their itineraries.

The tiny Napa Valley store opened more than 20 years ago as a neighborhood grocery serving local winegrowers. The business has grown to include five stores in San Francisco's Bay Area, and a mail-order catalog so that you can enjoy California's culinary bounty no matter where you are.

Call Oakville Grocery when you're craving some of the acclaimed fresh-fruit preserves made by Albert and Kim Katz or when you want to try O Olive Oil's incredible Meyer lemon or blood orange olive oil. To stock your pantry, order the Joys of the Table box (above), or stage a tasting with the Ultimate Olive Oil Tasting Box. You can even take advantage of Oakville's extraordinary cheese selection by phone. (I'm a fan of the artisanal cheeses packed in a tin milk bucket along with tasting notes from Oakville's cheese buyer.) For a catalog, call the Oakville Grocery (800/455-2305), or visit www.oakvillegrocery.com.

—Jan Newberry, restaurant critic and food writer,
Oakland, California

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The folks who make the ultra-comfortable OXO Good-Grips tools have added two new products that should get a workout in the kitchen:

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Sesame Shake Bread

1 whole loaf of Sourdough French Bread or Italian Bread
4oz. EDEN Extra Virgin Olive Oil
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Cut bread lengthwise into two halves. Brush the top of each half loaf evenly with 2oz. of olive oil.

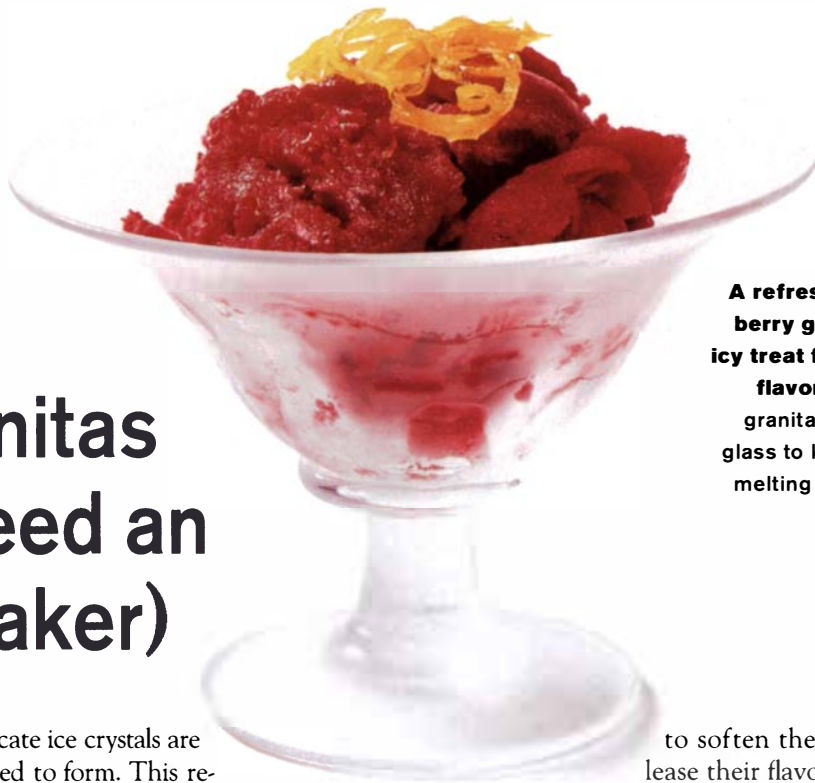
Sprinkle generously with Gomasio. Put two halves together, wrap loaf in aluminum foil, heat at 350° for 10 minutes and serve.

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How to Make Intensely Flavored Granitas (You Don't Need an Ice-Cream Maker)



A refreshing raspberry granita—an icy treat full of fruit flavor. Serve the granita in a chilled glass to keep it from melting too quickly.

A granita is an icy frozen dessert similar to a snow cone in texture but with the intense flavor of a well-made sorbet. In fact, the ingredients for a granita can be exactly the same for a sorbet. The key difference is that a sorbet is made smooth by spinning the ingredients in an ice-cream maker, which prevents large ice crystals from forming.

A granita, on the other hand, is intentionally made icy by being allowed to freeze with only occasional stirring so that

long, delicate ice crystals are encouraged to form. This refreshing iciness keeps even the sweetest flavorings from becoming cloying. What I like most about granitas is that they don't require any special equipment. I just combine a liquid flavoring with a sugar syrup, pour the mixture into a container, and freeze it.

Pick a favorite flavor

You can make a granita out of just about any liquid or purée. Granitas can be savory, such

as those served as an *intermezzo* (between courses), but they're most often sweet.

This time of year, I go for granitas made from juicy, ripe summer berries, such as raspberries and strawberries. Berries and other soft fruits, like mango and pineapple, need only be puréed and strained and they're ready to use. Firm fruits like pears and apples should be cooked first

to soften them and release their flavor. You can cook them in a little water or wine until tender or poach them right in the sugar syrup. Even easier are granitas flavored with citrus juice, coffee, or wine.

No recipe needed. In fact, because fruits and wines all have different degrees of natural sweetness, tartness, (and, in the case of fruit, pectin), it's almost impossible to standardize a recipe. You're better off tasting the granita mixture

Combine puréed fruit with a simple sugar syrup



Purée raw or cooked fruit in a food processor. Strain any fibers or small seeds through a sieve, pushing on the fruit with a wooden spoon.



Make a simple syrup. Combine an equal volume of sugar and water, bring it to a boil, and let it cool.



Add the syrup to your flavoring. If you've puréed fruit, pour the syrup through the strainer to extract all the flavor. Keep tasting for sweetness as you go, but remember the granita will taste less sweet when frozen.



Thin the purée with water until it lightly coats the back of a wooden spoon. Taste again and add a tablespoon or two of lemon juice and a pinch of salt to brighten the granita's flavor, if needed.

as you go and accepting that the texture of your finished granita can vary—from very icy to almost creamy—from one batch to the next, even if you follow a recipe exactly.

Mix in a sugar syrup

Sugar syrup—made by boiling sugar in water until it dissolves—sweetens the granita and gives the mixture the right consistency for proper freezing.

You can also add subtle flavor to the granita by infusing the sugar syrup, also called a simple syrup, with herbs, a vanilla bean, or whole spices.

I find that a simple syrup made with equal parts water and sugar works for most granitas. Because the sugar gives the granita a softer texture, you may want to lessen the amount of sugar in the syrup if you're using a very sweet ingredient, such as very ripe raspberries. This is also true if you plan to add alcohol, which inhibits freezing and also softens the granita.

Add the syrup a little at a time and taste as you go. The amount will depend on the natural acidity or bitterness (in the case of chocolate or coffee) of the mixture. The mixture will taste less sweet once it's frozen, so make it just a tad sweeter than you want the finished granita to taste.

The mixture should coat a spoon lightly. This consistency will usually give you the proper icy results. If the mixture is too thick, add a little plain water, but again, taste as you go so you don't dilute the flavor. To give fruit or wine granitas a boost of flavor, add a tablespoon or two of lemon juice and a pinch of salt.

Freeze and stir

Any kind of container will work for freezing, but a square or rectangular cake pan or plastic container will allow the mixture to freeze more quickly and will give you room to scrape out the granita.

Break up the ice crystals with a fork. Though you're

Four easy granita recipes to get you started

You can jazz up these recipes by infusing the sugar syrup with herbs, spices, or vanilla bean; strain the syrup if you do.

Fruit purée granitas—Add $\frac{1}{2}$ to 1 cup simple syrup to about 3 cups fruit purée. Add 1 to 2 tablespoons lemon juice and a pinch of salt to liven up the flavor. Freeze.

Wine granita—Add 1 to $1\frac{1}{2}$ cups simple syrup to 3 cups red or white wine, tasting as you go. Freeze.

Coffee granita—Sweeten 4 cups very strong dark-roast coffee with 6 tablespoons sugar or more to taste. Let it cool. You can also add a few tablespoons of Cognac or whiskey. Freeze.

Cocoa granita—Bring 3 cups water to a boil. In a small bowl, combine $\frac{3}{4}$ cup good-quality unsweetened cocoa with $\frac{3}{4}$ cup sugar. Whisk in just enough of the boiling water to work the mixture to a smooth paste. Whisk in the rest of the water. Let the mixture cool and then freeze.

not looking for the creaminess of a sorbet, you also don't want your granita to freeze into a rock-solid block of ice. Stirring the mixture every half hour or so as it freezes breaks up the largest ice crystals and gives you the proper crystalline structure. This stirring also keeps the granita from separating while it freezes.

Scrape and serve

Once the granita is frozen, it's no longer scoopable. Instead, it needs to be scraped, usually with an ice-cream scoop, to shave off enough for a serving.

Granitas made with a lot of sugar or alcohol may be scraped right out of the freezer. More often, you'll need to let the granita soften by taking it out of the freezer for about 10 minutes before serving. Scrape toward you and put the granita into chilled glasses so it doesn't melt too quickly. You can also scrape all of the granita at once and put it back in the freezer until it's time to serve it.

Fixing a granita that's too soft or too hard

A granita that's like an ice cube and too hard to scrape usually means that there was too much water in the fruit or the simple syrup. To fix it, let the granita melt until you can break it into chunks. Pulse the chunks in the food processor until crushed and then refreeze; it should be easier to scrape. If you make the same granita again, add more sugar to the simple syrup or add a little alcohol to the mixture.

If the granita mixture is too slushy and won't freeze solid, there's too much sugar in the fruit or too much sugar or alcohol in the syrup. Scrape the granita into the food processor, add a half cup of water, mix it thoroughly, and refreeze it.

James Peterson is a contributing editor to Fine Cooking. He's working on a revised edition of his award-winning Sauces (Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1991.) ♦

Freeze, stir, and scrape



Pour the mixture into a container and freeze, stirring periodically. Use a fork to pull the ice crystals away from the sides of the container and vigorously stir the mixture to prevent separating.



Scrape out the granita with an ice-cream scoop and serve in chilled glasses. If the granita is too hard, let it sit out for 10 minutes or so before scraping.

Starting Your Own Mini Cellar

Though the words “wine cellar” may bring to mind stone steps leading down to a cobwebby cave, or the Cary Grant–Ingrid Bergman cellar scene in *Notorious*, keeping a wine cellar needn’t be a somber undertaking. And the decision to start one is as easy as deciding that the bottle you bought for tonight’s dinner isn’t right and putting it aside for another occasion. If you buy a few extra bottles each time you shop, before long you’ll have a wine collection.

A collection of goodies for every occasion

So why else bother stowing wine away? There are lots of good reasons.

You’ll have bottles you know at your fingertips. For

me, having a cellar is like having a pantry well stocked with great ingredients. It means that I have on hand both young and vintage wines that I’m familiar with, making a bang-up dinner easy and fun to put together.

You’ll have good wines for impromptu occasions. Especially if you don’t have a wine merchant down the street, a wine cellar means that you’ve got delicious bottles around to serve drop-in guests or to bring to that last-minute dinner at your neighbor’s.

You’ll be able to take advantage of sales and bargains. Deciding to stock up on wine means that, for reasonable prices, you can buy recent releases that will be



Move over, shoes and boots. A wine cellar can be as simple as a few boxes and a tasting log stashed in your bedroom closet.

hard to find or astronomically priced years from now when the wines come to maturity.

You’ll taste the aging process as it happens. If you buy six or twelve bottles of some-

thing good, you’ll have years of interesting drinking, because you’ll be able to taste a bottle every year or two, checking on the wine’s development as time goes by.

Here’s a loose guide to help with your cellaring strategy

CELLARING TIME: PRESENT TO 2 YEARS FROM NOW

White Wines

Australia: Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc

Italy: Pinot Grigio, Pinot Bianco

New Zealand: Sauvignon Blanc

Red Wines

Australia: Grenache

California: Pinot Noir, Merlot

France: Coteaux du Languedoc, Côtes du Roussillon, Côtes du Rhône

Italy: Nebbiolo delle Langhe, Rosso di Montalcino

Spain: Navarra

CELLARING TIME: 3 TO 8 YEARS FROM NOW

White Wines

California: Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc

France: Alsace, Loire

Italy: Friuli (Sauvignon), Alto Adige (Pinot Bianco)

Red Wines

Australia: Shiraz-Cabernet and Shiraz-Grenache blends

California: Syrah, Zinfandel

France: Loire (Chinon), Rhône (Cornas, Gigondas, St. Joseph), Burgundy, Bordeaux

Italy: Tuscany (Chianti, Sangiovese), Valpolicella (small producers)

Portugal: Barca Velha

CELLARING TIME: 10 YEARS FROM NOW

White Wines

dry wines

Austria: Wachau

California: Carneros and Russian River (Chardonnay)

France: Burgundy, Alsace

sweet wines

California: late-harvest dessert wines

France: Sauternes

Germany: Spätlese, Trockenbeerenauslese, Auslese

Hungary: Tokaji

Red Wines

dry wines

Australia: Barossa Valley (Shiraz); Cabernet blends

California: Napa and Sonoma (Cabernet)

France: Burgundy, Bordeaux, northern Rhône

Italy: Piemonte, Tuscany

Spain: Rioja, Ribera del Duero

sweet wines

Portugal: Port, Madeira

You'll have wonderful wines for special occasions. Whether it's to enjoy with a few friends over dinner, as a gift for your best friend's fiftieth, or to pop open for your kids' college graduations, you'll have wines to savor for years to come.

Think short, medium, and long term

Whether your collection consists of fifteen cases or two, the collecting strategy remains the same.

A good plan is to think in time blocks of short, medium, and long term. Although it's impossible for me to list the life spans of all wines, here's an idea of the types of wine you should consider for each time block.

◆ **Short-term wines for casual get-togethers and weeknight dinners.** There are a wealth of these from every wine-growing region in the world, especially white

wines from California, Australia, Italy, France, and New Zealand, and reds from Spain's Navarra, France's Languedoc-Roussillon, and California's Monterey and Central Coast regions. Expect to spend \$7 to \$20 per bottle.

◆ **Medium-term wines for special dinner parties and**

and Bordeaux. Other reds to search out for medium-term aging are Italian Chianti, California Syrah and Zinfandel, Australian Shiraz, and wines from the southern Rhône in France. Look for white wines from Alsace and the Loire in France, from Tuscany and Friuli in Italy, and Char-

stores and grab them now while they're available and affordable. The payoff will be some delicious finds that you'll enjoy years from now.

For the most part, wines in this category will be reds—look to Italy's Piemonte and Tuscany regions, to Burgundy, Bordeaux, and the northern Rhône in France, to Rioja, Ribera del Duero, and Catalonia in Spain, and to Portugal for ports and Madeira. The most age-worthy white wines in this group are dessert wines from Germany and Hungary, and Sauternes from France. The sky's the limit here as far as spending goes, but expect to start at about \$15.

Whether you have one mixed case or a closetful of wine, think of your wine cellar in blocks of time.

treats. These are wines that will be a step up in quality, with aging potential for three to ten years. This is probably the easiest category to shop for; reds especially are plentiful. You'll find delicious bargains that drink well in the near future from important regions known for their long-aging wines, such as Burgundy

donnay and Sauvignon Blanc from California. Expect to spend \$12 to \$30 for wines with medium-term aging potential.

◆ **Long-term wines for special occasions and important dinners.** These will have the structure and complexity for ten years of aging and beyond. Look for specials at wine

Wine needs peace and quiet in a cool, humid spot

Wine likes dark, cool, humid conditions, and the absence of vibration. You won't often find all those conditions in your home unless you install a cooling unit, so I advise a compromise. Find the coolest spot in the basement, away from heating units and water heaters, or a closet that isn't positioned on an outside wall.

If you feel yourself becoming really impassioned about collecting wine, you may find your stash growing too big for your house. When my collection started taking over my apartment, I rented a wine locker. In many cities, companies rent small lockers for long-term wine storage. Ask your local wine merchant: chances are he or she has bottles stowed there, too.

Steve Ledbetter is the European wine buyer for Prima Wine Merchants, a retailer, restaurant, and wine bar in Walnut Creek, California. ◆

Tips for home wine storage

The wine cellar of my dreams is a glass-enclosed room with a quarry tile floor and custom cherrywood racks, but for now, I use a closet in my apartment and a wine storage locker nearby, which works just fine. Here are some hints on wine storage.

◆ Choose the darkest, coolest place in the house. If it's the basement and yours is prone to flooding,

keep boxes on a pallet so they're off the floor.

◆ Resist the temptation to display wines on the hutch shelf. No matter how nifty-looking, wine racks belong sheltered from light.

◆ Keep wine away from machinery that vibrates or throws off heat.

◆ Lay bottles on their side to keep the corks moist so air won't get in the bottle.

◆ Racks make finding bottles easier, but they're not a must. Keeping wines in their original cartons is fine; just be sure the boxes are sturdy. Wooden wine crates work well, too; check to see if your wine retailer is getting rid of some.

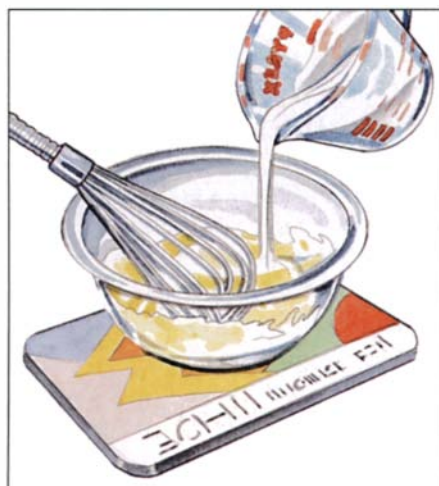
◆ If you're stashing wine in boxes, mark the contents clearly on the outside.

◆ Keep a cellar log and inventory, whether

it's a notebook or a sheet of paper, listing medium- and long-term wines and about when they should be drunk. After you've tried a bottle, mark it off by entering dates and tasting notes.

◆ Stow bottles to be drunk soon within easy reach. Make sure long-aging wines are harder to reach, so you're not tempted to drink them before they're ready.

Do you have a better way to clean fresh greens, a neat trick for handling sticky bread dough, or a new way to use an old kitchen tool? Write to *Tips, Fine Cooking*, PO Box 5506, Newtown, CT 06470-5506. Or send your tip by e-mail to fc@taunton.com. We pay for tips we publish.



Mousepads in the kitchen—slip them under bowls while whisking.

Mousepads are all-purpose kitchen tools

Too many freebie mousepads? I use extras to prevent pastry boards from slipping and bowls from “creeping” when I’m whisking or beating. Mousepads are also great on the table under hotpots, casseroles, and plates, and when used to prevent appliances from damaging the counter. The only

thing mousepads are no good at is trapping mice.

—Susan Asanovic,
Wilton, CT

Frozen rocks keep crudités cool

When I saw how another reader used a heated rock as a bread warmer, I decided to share how I use frozen rocks to keep my crudités crisp and cold. Instead of

Neat and steady cake decorating

When frosting a cake, anchor the bottom layer with a dab of frosting or jam in the center of the cake platter. This keeps the cake from sliding around.

Also, to keep the serving platter clean while working, position four or five strips of waxed paper or parchment around the bottom and slightly under the cake, letting the extra drape over the

platter’s edge. Remove the strips when you’re finished decorating.

—Mary Sullivan,
Concord, CA

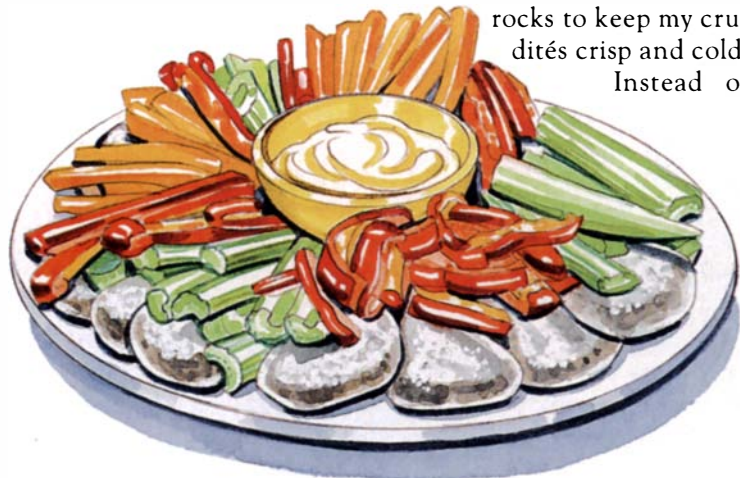
Dish soap protects stove from boil-overs

As a home beer brewer, I used to get annoyed at how my stovetop turned black during the long boiling period. Then I learned this trick, which I now use whenever I’m cooking something that threatens to boil over or make a mess of the stove. Dab some dishwashing liquid on a paper towel and spread a thin film of soap on the stovetop before cooking. Afterward, use a wet towel to wipe off any marks. No scrubbing necessary.

—Jim Basara,
Falls Church, VA

Organize magazines by seasons, not titles

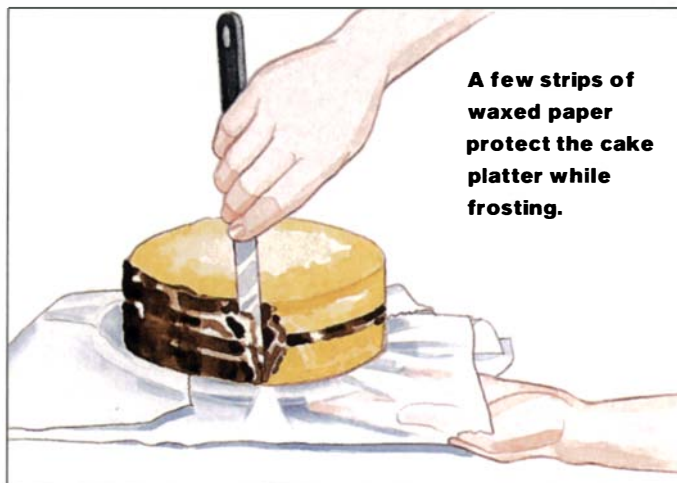
As a culinary professional and an avid reader, I save many cooking magazines. I used to save all of one title in binders for each year, but now I save mixed titles in separate binders or boxes for each month. Now when I’m looking for information about a seasonal food or particular



Smooth white rocks, scrubbed and then frozen, make a cool base for raw vegetables.

ice cubes, I use small white rocks that have been scrubbed, rinsed, and stored in the freezer in a plastic bag. Smooth river rocks are ideal. I layer the chilled rocks in a bowl or on a platter and pile the vegetables on top. It makes a beautiful presentation, and, best of all, the rocks don’t melt.

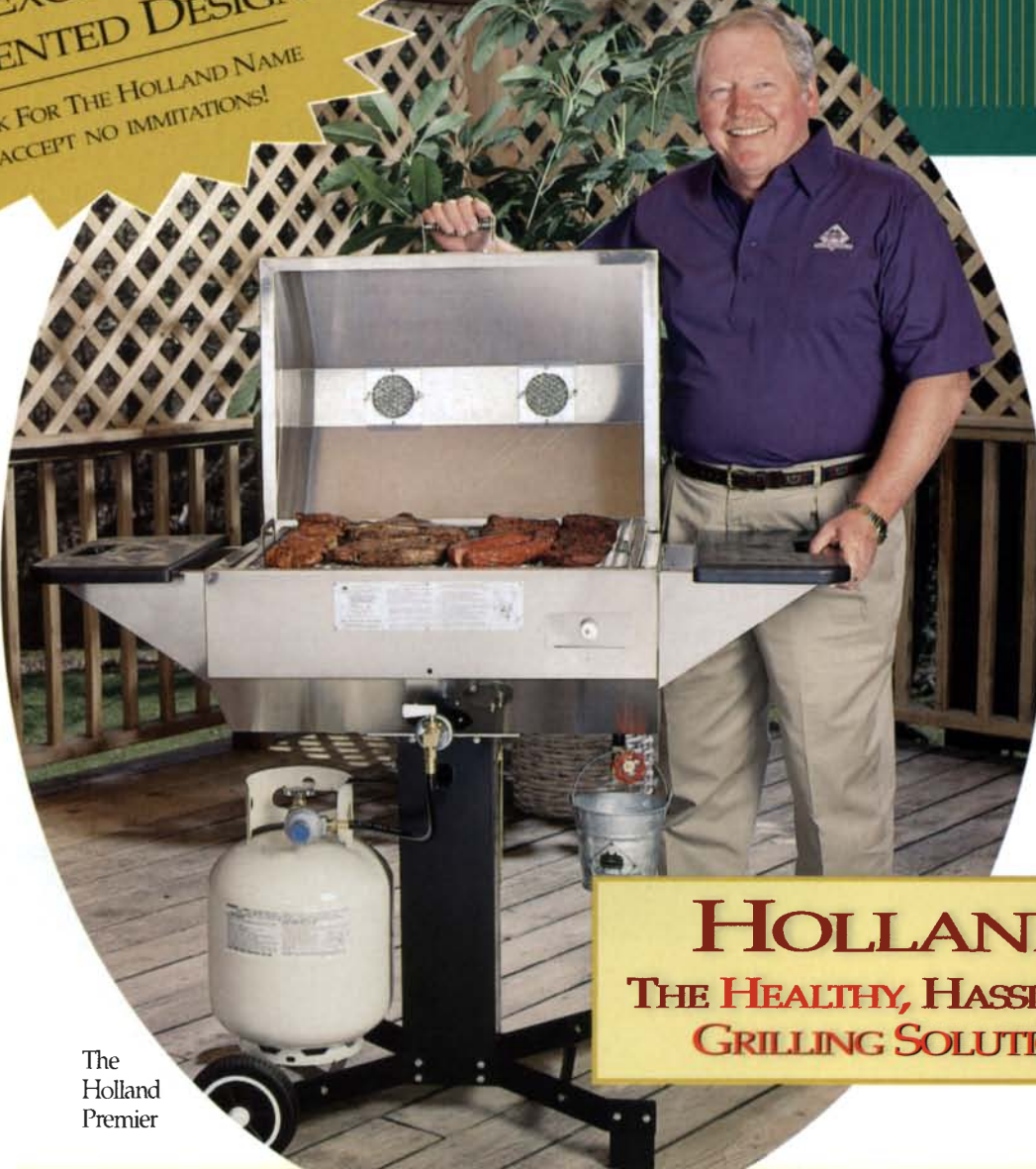
—Robin Brisco,
Tustin, CA



A few strips of waxed paper protect the cake platter while frosting.

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TIPS

holiday, all the information is together. As I flip through the monthly files, I often find foods that pair well with the one for which I had originally sought information. I also organize my fishing and gardening magazines (including *Fine Gardening*) this way.

—Tim Furst,
Frederick, MD

Scrape portabellas clean with a grapefruit spoon

Before cooking or grilling portabella mushroom caps, I remove the unsightly dark gills from under the cap by using a grapefruit spoon. The serrated edge on the spoon removes the gills easily, with little or no damage to the cap. I toss the gills into my garden as compost.

—Peter Hyzak,
Annandale, NJ



A soda bottle full of cold water can double as a rolling pin.

Cold soda bottle rolls out a sticky dough

When I need a rolling pin for a small job, I fill a one-liter soda bottle with cold water. The weight of the bottle and the cold of the liquid inside tames even the stickiest of doughs. If the dough does

stick, I just add a little flour.

—Nancy Smith,
New Buffalo, MI

Shake potatoes clean

Scrubbing new potatoes is really tedious, but I've found that I can shake them clean using a container with a tight-

fitting lid, like a large Tupperware box or bin. Fill the container with small potatoes, add water one-third of the way up, seal the container, and shake vigorously. Then change the water and repeat the process until the water is clear.

—Diane Flanders,
Ashland, WI

Sweet onions stay fresh in refrigerator crisper

To keep sweet onions (like Vidalia, Texas, Walla Walla, or Maui) in good condition, put them in a brown paper bag and store them in the crisper drawer of the refrigerator. They'll stay firm much longer.

—Margaret Blakely,
New Philadelphia, OH

Baking soda balances a lemony hummus

Have you ever added too

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much lemon juice to your hummus? No problem. Just stir in a pinch of baking soda. It will neutralize the excess acid with no added color, flavor, or texture.

—Sara Zwicker,
Braintree, MA

Spray butter on phyllo

I like to use a spritzer to apply melted butter to phyllo pastry. I find that I use less butter than when I use a pastry brush, and the result is lighter and less greasy. I melt the butter in a pot and let the milk solids settle to the bottom. Then I pour the warm clarified butter into a food-safe spray bottle. I give each sheet of phyllo two or three quick sprays for an even coating. I keep the spray bottle parked in a bowl of hot tap water so the butter stays liquid. No

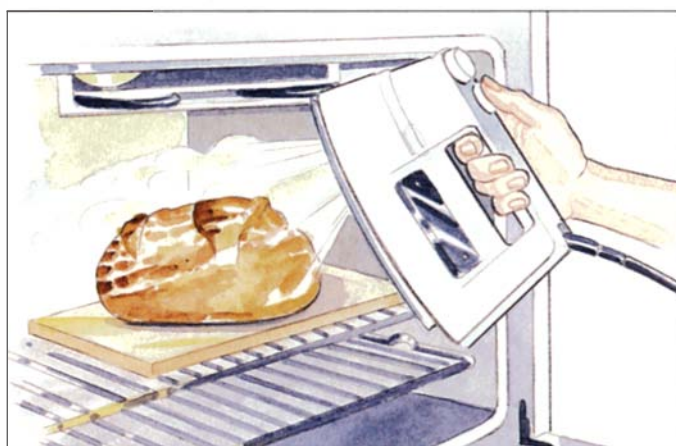
more pastry brush with congealed butter build-up.

—Lilia Dvarionas,
Kanata, Ontario

Disposable cake pans are great for giveaway cheesecakes

When I'm making a cheesecake as a gift, I line the bottom of the pan with a disposable cake pan. That way I don't lose the bottom when I give the cheesecake away. Cut off the sides of the cake pan and put the remaining flat circle over the removable bottom of a springform pan. Make sure you buy a cake pan that's the same size as your springform pan (or larger—you can always cut it down) so that you can get an exact fit.

—Gwen Roller,
Columbus, OH



A few blasts of steam yields a crisp crust on rustic bread.

Steam iron makes a crusty loaf of bread

After over thirty years of trying various methods to get a perfect crust on rustic-style breads, I finally found an easy way. Using a well-heated baking stone and the steam/spray feature of my iron (a Rowenta

Professional), I got just what I wanted: a shiny, very crisp crust. I spray the bread three times during the first fifteen minutes of baking, using four or five bursts of steam each time.

—Ruth Ross,
Northbrook, IL ♦

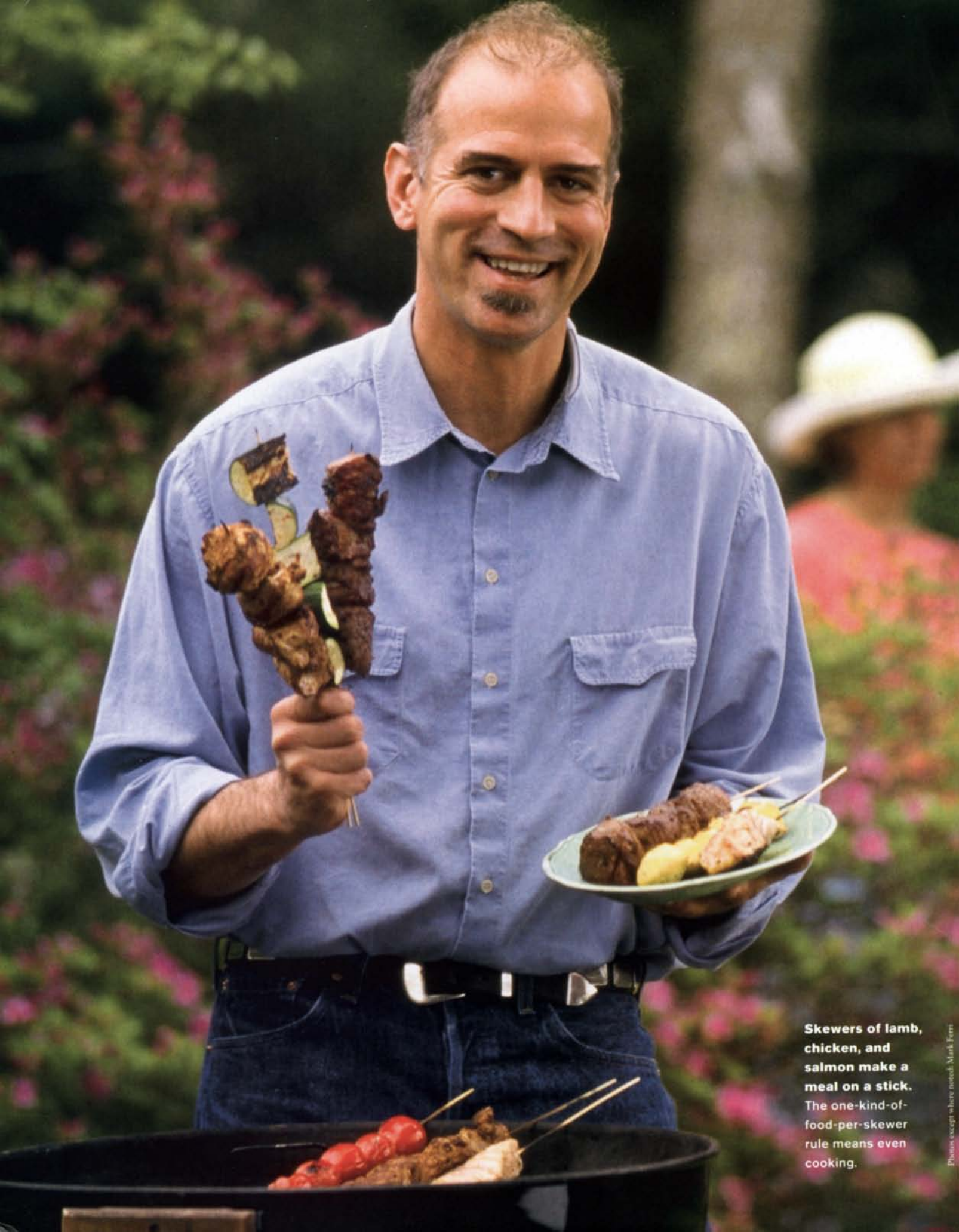
Nothing else says

HERE LIVES A COOK,
COME IN *and*
SIT DOWN.

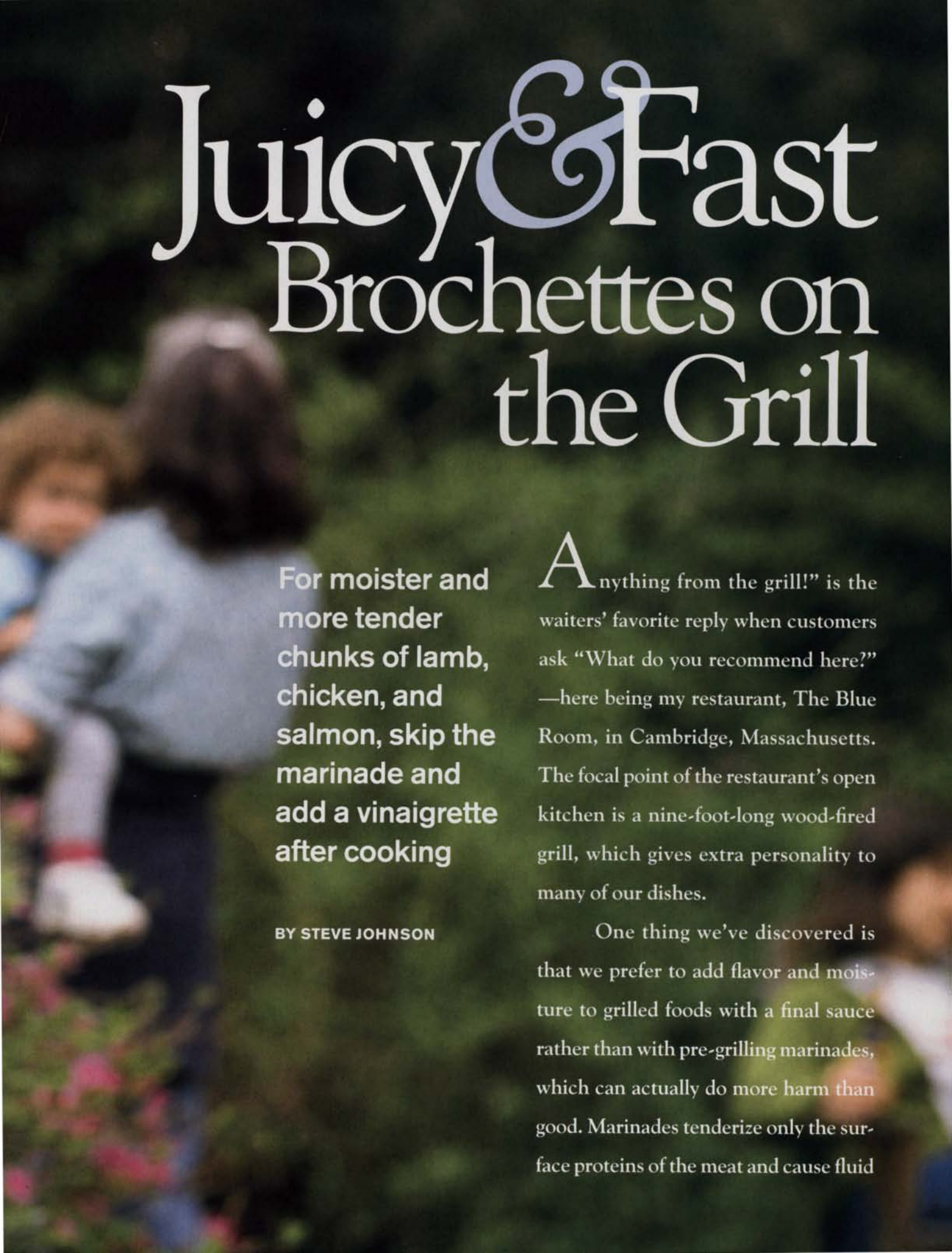
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Skewers of lamb, chicken, and salmon make a meal on a stick. The one-kind-of-food-per-skewer rule means even cooking.



Juicy & Fast Brochettes on the Grill

For moister and more tender chunks of lamb, chicken, and salmon, skip the marinade and add a vinaigrette after cooking

BY STEVE JOHNSON

Anything from the grill!" is the waiters' favorite reply when customers ask "What do you recommend here?"—here being my restaurant, The Blue Room, in Cambridge, Massachusetts. The focal point of the restaurant's open kitchen is a nine-foot-long wood-fired grill, which gives extra personality to many of our dishes.

One thing we've discovered is that we prefer to add flavor and moisture to grilled foods with a final sauce rather than with pre-grilling marinades, which can actually do more harm than good. Marinades tenderize only the surface proteins of the meat and cause fluid

Lamb



The skewer above gets only lamb. Before grilling, brush with olive oil and sprinkle on salt and pepper. After grilling, drizzle generously with a black olive and mint vinaigrette.



Lamb Brochettes with Black Olive and Mint Vinaigrette

loss, so you end up with a mushy surface and a drier piece of meat. Also, many oil-and-vinegar marinades make a mess on the grill: too much oil causes flare-ups, and the vinegar can splatter and turn to steam. Instead, I use these same ingredients to make a delicious vinaigrette that I can spoon onto the food after grilling.

This strategy makes sense for the home cook, too. It's economically more savvy (no reason to burn up your 12-year-old balsamic vinegar in a marinade when you can savor its subtleties in a sauce), and you don't sacrifice any flavor.

For delicious grilling without much fuss, I like to serve brochettes, which are essentially the French version of kebabs. Brochettes (pronounced broh-SHETS; the name comes from the metal skewer on which the food is threaded and grilled) are simple to prepare, fast to cook, and fun to serve. Perhaps the biggest practical advantage to serving brochettes is that you can cut the food into pieces before cooking, eliminating the need for awkward carving later and allowing you to go straight from the fire to the table.

Resist the temptation to mix and match

Whether you're grilling meat, fish, or vegetable brochettes, choose your ingredients carefully. Meat should be trimmed of any excess fat and gristle. Fish should be firm-fleshed (salmon, tuna, mahi-mahi) rather than flaky (cod, halibut) so it will hold its shape on the grill.

I belong to the single-food-per-skewer school of thought. The reason is simple: each food needs a different temperature and cooking time. By limiting each skewer to one food, I avoid having the cherry tomato explode all over the uncooked chunk of lamb.

Nip and tuck chunks before skewering

Brochettes are great because you're essentially portioning the food ahead of time, so don't hurry through this critical step. Cut lamb, beef, or chicken into pieces of uniform size and shape so they cook evenly.

Although flat metal skewers are best for holding pieces of food in place while turning, I use bamboo sticks, which are available in Asian markets and even in some supermarkets. They're inexpensive and disposable—one less thing to clean. Some chefs soak them in water to prevent burning on the grill, but it's usually sufficient to just pay close attention to the fire.

When you're ready to thread the meat on the skewers, group pieces of similar size together. You may need to fold the lamb or chicken into a ball, tucking in tapered ends and rounding off sharp angles, which would burn before the rest of the meat is cooked. You'll end up with slightly rounded chunks. Skewer the chunks, bunching them near the pointed end rather than in the middle of the skewer.

High heat for fatty brochettes; lower heat for leaner ones

My favorite grill at home is a Weber kettle. I find that a combination of small hardwood logs and lump charcoal gives me a hot fire with a 30- to 45-minute window for grilling.

If you plan to grill chicken, lamb, and salmon brochettes at the same time, you'll need to build a fire with areas of higher and lower heat. Or grill the brochettes in batches, starting with lamb, which needs higher heat, and then moving on to the salmon, and then to the chicken as the embers burn down.

Wait until the first guests arrive before lighting the grill so the fire doesn't die too soon. When the grate is hot, use a wire grill brush to scrub off grease, rust, and any charred bits of old food. Then rub the grill rods again with tongs and a wadded-up paper towel—you don't want this week's chicken tasting like last week's bluefish.

I use direct heat to grill these brochettes, and I don't use a cover. The kind of food on your brochette will determine the level of heat you need. Red meats that contain some fat, like lamb or beef, can tolerate higher heat. Fish works better over a medium to hot grill. Pork takes medium heat, and boneless chicken cooks best over lower heat because it has so little fat and no skin to protect it from drying out around the edges. If you choose to grill vegetable brochettes, use a lower heat. Vegetables have a high water content, so a lower temperature steams them inside while gently charring them outside.

Check the temperature of your fire by testing how long you can hold your hand a couple of inches above the grill. For the purposes of the recipes here, one second means you have a hot grill, two seconds is medium hot, and three seconds is medium.



Moroccan-Spiced Chicken Brochettes with Rosemary Oil

Just before you put the brochettes on the grill, wipe the grate once more with a paper towel lightly dipped in vegetable oil. This ensures that the grill is super-clean, and it also helps prevent sticking.

If it's firm to the touch, it's done

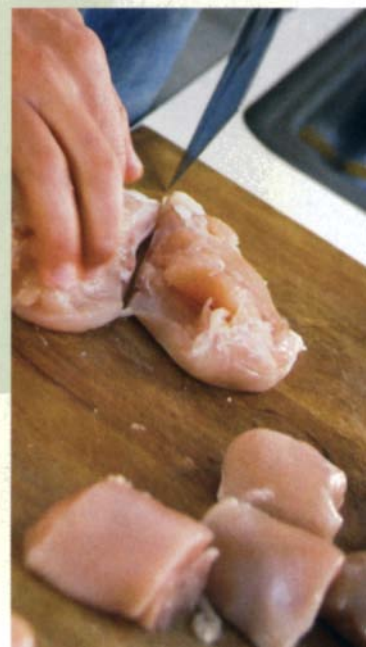
Brochettes cook very quickly, and, because of that, the boundary between perfectly cooked and overcooked can be crossed in the time it takes to answer the doorbell. There's no substitute to paying close attention at the grill. Use all your senses. Listen to the sizzle as you put the fish on—if it lasts longer than a few seconds, the fire is probably too hot. If you see flare-ups or if the brochette is browning too fast, move the skewer to an area of lower heat.

I use tongs to move and turn the brochettes because they can grip the food without tearing it. I test for doneness by touching the meat or fish with my finger. When it feels firm and slightly springy, but not hard, it's done.

Brochettes can be served just as they are. Arrange the skewers on a platter, drizzle them with sauce, and let your friends dig in. If a large brochette of lamb or chicken seems too clumsy for one person, slide the meat off onto one central platter and let guests sauce the food themselves.

Chicken

Aim for consistency in size when cutting up chicken. Odd shapes can be folded or rolled into a ball, but odd sizes will grill unevenly.



Vegetable brochettes

Vegetable brochettes can be tricky because the odd shapes and sizes of the vegetables play havoc with cooking times. If you skewer several kinds of vegetable on one brochette (this goes against my single-food-per-skewer rule, but I know some people will do it anyway), compensate for variations by carefully choosing and cutting the vegetables. Use medium heat, about the same as you would for chicken. Here are some of my favorite vegetables for brochettes, from the fastest cooking to the slowest:

Cherry tomatoes—skewer whole
Summer squash—cut in uniform chunks
Eggplant—cut in uniform chunks
Portabellas—quarter
Fennel—quarter
Beets—parboil; halve or quarter
New potatoes—parboil; halve or quarter
Baby onions—skewer whole

Salmon



Try to thread the skewer straight down the middle of the salmon strip so it stays intact when it's time to turn during grilling. A clean, well-oiled grate is crucial, too.



Salmon Brochettes with Sliced Fennel Vinaigrette

RECIPES

Salmon Brochettes with Sliced Fennel Vinaigrette

Serve these brochettes with a salad of arugula and red onion. The vinaigrette doubles as a salad dressing. *Serves eight; yields 1½ cups vinaigrette.*

FOR THE FENNEL VINAIGRETTE:

- 1 clove garlic
- 2 anchovy fillets
- 1 Tbs. capers, rinsed
- 1 tsp. grainy mustard
- 2 shallots, thinly sliced
- ¼ medium bulb fennel, outer leaves removed, cored, and thinly sliced (crosswise)
- ½ tsp. fresh thyme
- ½ tsp. crushed fennel seeds
- ¼ tsp. dried red chile flakes
- ⅓ cup fresh lemon juice; more as needed
- 1 cup extra-virgin olive oil
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste

FOR THE BROCHETTES:

- 4 lb. fresh salmon fillet (skin on)
- Kosher salt
- Olive oil for brushing

To make the vinaigrette—On a cutting board, mince together the garlic, anchovies, and capers. Transfer to a bowl and add the mustard, shallots, fennel, thyme, fennel seeds, chile flakes, and lemon juice. Stir briefly. Mix in the olive oil with a fork. Season with salt and pepper. Taste the vinaigrette; it should be slightly acidic when used with grilled fish, so add more lemon juice if necessary. Let stand for at least 1 hour so the fennel softens and the flavors mingle.

To make the brochettes—Prepare the grill. Cut the salmon crosswise into 1-inch wide strips, 3 to 4 oz. each. Thread the skewers through the salmon strips: starting at the tapered end, carefully pierce the flesh, pushing the skewer all the way through to the fat end until the point pokes through.

When the grill is just on the hot side of medium (you should be able to hold your hand just above the grate for 2 seconds), use tongs to clean the grate with a lightly oiled paper towel.

Season the salmon lightly with salt and brush lightly with olive oil. Put the brochettes on the grill, skin side down, keeping the exposed skewer ends away from the fire if you're using bamboo.

The salmon will cook quickly but not always at the same rate. Cook until the skin is crispy and it “releases” from the grill, 2 to 3 min. Turn the brochettes with tongs or a spatula and cook another 1 min. If necessary, turn again and cook another 1 min. The salmon is ready when the flesh feels firm and almost begins to flake apart. Put the brochettes on a platter and drizzle immediately with the vinaigrette.

Lamb Brochettes with Black Olive & Mint Vinaigrette

The intense meaty flavor of these brochettes is nicely offset by a dish of boiled fresh new potatoes. If you can't find fresh marjoram, use another fresh herb, like oregano. *Serves eight; yields 2 cups vinaigrette.*

FOR THE OLIVE AND MINT VINAIGRETTE:

- 2 cloves garlic
- 1 Tbs. capers, rinsed
- 3 oz. (½ cup) kalamata or other good-quality black olives, pitted
- 3 shallots, thinly sliced
- 1 Tbs. grainy mustard
- 1 Tbs. chopped fresh marjoram (optional)
- 1 Tbs. chopped fresh mint
- ⅓ cup red-wine vinegar; more as needed
- 1 cup extra-virgin olive oil; more as needed
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste

FOR THE BROCHETTES:

- 4 lb. lamb shoulder or stew meat, cut into pieces of uniform size, about 2-inch cubes
- Olive oil for brushing
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper

To make the vinaigrette—On a cutting board, mince together the garlic, capers, and olives. Transfer to a mixing bowl. Stir in the shallots, mustard, marjoram, mint, and vinegar. Mix in the olive oil with a fork to make a loose vinaigrette—it does not need to be emulsified. Season with salt and pepper. Taste and add more oil or vinegar if necessary. Set aside.

To make the brochettes—Prepare the grill. In a mixing bowl, lightly coat the meat with the olive oil. Season with salt and pepper.

Skewer the lamb by folding or shaping each chunk of meat into a rounded cube. Thread three or four pieces on each skewer, leaving the meat near the pointed end rather than the middle of the skewer.

When the grill is hot (you should be able to hold your hand just above the grate for 1 second), use tongs to clean the grate with a lightly oiled paper towel.

Grill the brochettes, keeping the exposed ends of

the skewers away from the hottest part of the fire if you're using bamboo. Turn the brochettes every 2 min.; some will cook faster than others, so you may need to rotate the skewers to even out the grilling. The lamb is medium-rare when the cubes begin to resist pressure when touched, after about 8 min. Before serving, let the brochettes rest a moment to allow the juices to redistribute. Drizzle liberally with the vinaigrette.

Moroccan-Spiced Chicken with Rosemary Oil

This North African spice rub is based on *ras el hanout*, a traditional blend of spices used in grilling, roasting, and stewing. A batch of this mixture will keep for the whole season; it pairs well with meat and fish, too.

Serves eight; yields scant 1 cup spice mix.

FOR THE ROSEMARY OIL:

1 clove garlic, crushed
 ¼ tsp. freshly ground black pepper
 Pinch dried red chile flakes
 1 sprig fresh rosemary
 1 bay leaf
 1 cup extra-virgin olive oil

FOR THE SPICE RUB:

⅓ cup ground cumin
 ¼ cup ground coriander
 2 tsp. ground cinnamon
 2 tsp. ground allspice
 1 tsp. ground cloves
 1 Tbs. hot chili powder
 2 tsp. paprika
 1 tsp. cayenne
 1 tsp. whole aniseed
 1 Tbs. *herbes de Provence* (or mixed dried fine herbs)
 4½ tsp. kosher salt; more for serving
 2 tsp. freshly ground black pepper

FOR THE BROCHETTES:

3 lb. boneless, skinless chicken breasts
 ¼ cup olive oil
 Lemon wedges for serving

To make the rosemary oil—In a medium saucepan, combine the garlic, pepper, dried chile flakes, rosemary, bay leaf, and oil. Heat on low until the oil just barely comes to a simmer and the garlic bubbles and floats to the surface, about 5 min. Immediately turn off the heat and allow the oil to infuse for 1 hour. When cool, strain the oil through a fine sieve. The oil should be used the same day, or else store it in the refrigerator for a maximum of three days.

To make the spice rub—In a bowl, thoroughly blend all 12 spices; set aside.

To make the brochettes—Prepare the grill. Cut the chicken into equal chunks, each about 2½ inches. Put the chicken on a plate; sprinkle with enough of the spice rub to lightly coat, about 3 Tbs. (Store the rest of the spice rub in an airtight container.) Drizzle the olive oil over the chicken and toss lightly.

Thread the chicken onto skewers, folding when necessary to get round, even chunks, each a little bigger than a ping-pong ball. The chicken can be grilled immediately or held in the refrigerator for up to 1 hour.

When the grill is at medium heat (you should be able to hold your hand just above the grate for 3 seconds), use tongs to clean the grate with a lightly oiled paper towel.

Grill the brochettes for 4 min. on one side, keeping the exposed skewer ends away from the hottest part of the fire if you're using bamboo. Turn and cook until the chicken is browned and firm, about 4 min. more. You may need to turn and move the brochettes to keep the chicken from cooking at too high a heat, which will dry out the edges before the inside is done. If you're not sure that the chicken is completely cooked, pierce one piece to see that there's no pinkness. Remove the brochettes from the grill and drizzle with some of the rosemary oil. Serve with the oil, lemon wedges, and a bowl of kosher salt for extra seasoning.

Steve Johnson is the chef-owner of The Blue Room in Cambridge, Massachusetts. ♦



Simmer and infuse. Rosemary oil tops off Moroccan-spiced chicken; use the extra to flavor grilled vegetables.



wine choices

Look to versatile reds for lamb, chicken, and salmon brochettes

Brochettes are hard to beat for tasty, carefree summer entertaining. Although all three recipes start with quite different ingredients, they all have the kiss of fire in common. Though I'll recommend particular wines for each dish, you'd also be safe pairing any of these red wines with any of the recipes.

Even the salmon. Fish, yes—but its firm texture, rich flavor, and the smoke from the

grill steer it smoothly toward red wine. Especially Pinot Noir, the lightest of the varieties I'll mention here, which has notes of smoke, black pepper, and sometimes licorice (great with the fennel). And low- to medium-priced Pinots are often quite fruity, balancing both the spice of chile and the saltiness of anchovies and capers. Gloria Ferrer and Kenwood from California and Oregon's King

Estate are all fine candidates.

Whenever I see the better part of a spice shelf in a recipe, I think of Zinfandel. It can match the cinnamon, clove, and black pepper flavor of the chicken recipe and there's enough fruit, especially in the lighter ones, to stand up to hot spice. Try Foppiano from Sonoma or Shenandoah from Amador County.

For me, lamb in summer means a soft, suave Merlot.

This easy-drinking wine loves the olives, garlic, mustard, and mint seasonings used here. Boucheron Merlot from the Pays d'Oc in France, Mandrielle from Banfi in Tuscany, and the Chilean Vina Tarapaca all offer good quality and value.

Rosina Tinari Wilson teaches and writes about food and wine pairing in San Francisco's Bay Area.

Soul-Satisfying Grains Make Hearty Salads

These days, grains are hugely popular because they're not only delicious, but they're very nutritious as well. My grandmother must have known instinctively that grains were long on the good stuff (B vitamins, fiber, minerals) and short on the bad stuff (low in fat, no cholesterol) because years ago, she was cooking grains of all kinds. We lived on a ranch in Colorado, and grains like whole wheat and barley were always in her pantry. And she knew how to use them, whether in satisfying soups or hearty casseroles.

Since I've followed my grandmother to the stove, I love using grains in many different ways—especially in salads. The subtle, earthy flavors of many grains make a perfect foil for all kinds of dressings and condiments—not to mention for the overflow from the summer vegetable garden. Grain salads hold up and travel well, making excellent picnic or party fare.

I like to take advantage of the wide variety of grains now available in the markets. While barley, wild rice, wheatberries, and hominy are still some of my favorite grains, I've started to cook with millet (a staple of Africa), rye berries, triticale (a nutritious cross of wheat and rye), dried sweet corn, and even amaranth, quinoa, and buckwheat, which aren't technically grains (defined as the "fruit" or berries of grasses), but we eat them in the same way.

With this huge variety of grains, it's fun to experiment. Once you make a few grain salad recipes, you can begin substituting one grain for another or combining two (cooked separately) in one recipe. For instance, I sometimes like to use quinoa in place of the wheatberries in the Summer Wheat-

The earthy flavors and nutty textures of grains star in salads—learn to cook them just until done, and then toss them with zesty dressings

BY JOHN ASH

Drizzle an herby lime vinaigrette over a layered salad of barley, tomatoes, corn, scallions, roasted yellow peppers, and black-eyed peas. Toss and serve.



berry Salad, or I add cooked wild rice to the Lemon Rice Salad for color and flavor contrast. I've provided a chart of cooking times (see p. 38) and a list of sources for hard-to-find grains (at far right) so that you can experiment with different substitutions and combinations.

Tips for cooking grains for salads

The only real trick to using all these delicious grains in salads is learning to cook them properly.

Every batch of grain is slightly different: some batches may need more liquid or a longer cooking time.

Take care not to overcook grains. If you're cooking grains to use in salads, it's especially important not to overcook them or the salad will be mushy or uninteresting. You're going to combine the grains with vinaigrettes and other moist ingredients, so they will continue to absorb moisture. I suggest that when you cook grains, you use the same approach that you use with cooking pasta. As you near the end of the estimated cooking time, keep tasting them to make sure they're *al dente* (cooked through but with some pleasant texture left). When they get to that point, remove them from the stove and drain them if necessary.

Keep in mind that cooking times can vary widely according to how old the grains are and how they've been stored.

It's smart to buy your grains at a busy store that has quick turnover, but even then you might wind up with a particularly stubborn batch of grain that takes longer than usual to soften.

Let cooked grains cool completely before mixing them into salads. Warm grains can absorb too much of the salad's vinaigrette or slightly wilt



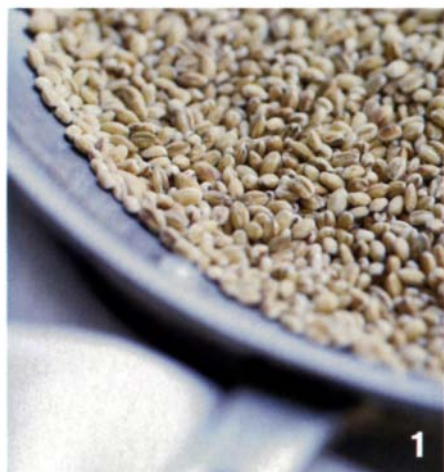
Add texture to a lemony basmati rice salad by stirring in crunchy nuts or seeds like pepitas.

raw ingredients like peppers and onions, so you should cool the grains completely before using them. One way is to spread them out on a baking sheet or a jelly roll pan (in one layer, if possible); this allows steam to escape quickly so the grains won't get cooked any further. I've included a few more cooling tips in the sidebar below.

Six tips for cooking grains for salads

1 Toast grains first for more flavor.

Toasting grains lightly, either dry or with a little fat in a sauté pan, intensifies their flavor and brings out their nuttiness.



2 Cook grains in flavorful stocks.

Instead of just cooking grains in water, add sautéed aromatic vegetables like onions, carrots, and celery, or cook the grains in vegetable or chicken stock. When seasoning grain salads, be bold with spices, herbs, and plenty of salt and pepper.



Barley & Black-Eyed Pea Salad

I like the flavor and texture of frozen black-eyed peas, but you can also use canned (rinse them well and don't cook them). Be sure to buy pearled barley, which has been hulled and polished. Barley that isn't pearled never really softens when cooked. *Serves six to eight.*

FOR THE SALAD:

- ½ cup pearled barley
- 1½ cups rich vegetable or chicken stock
- 1 cup frozen black-eyed peas
- 1 large yellow bell pepper, charred, peeled, and diced
- 1 cup seeded and diced ripe tomato
- ¾ to 1 cup diagonally sliced scallions (white and green parts)
- 1 cup cooked fresh (or thawed, frozen) corn kernels
- Green and red leaf lettuce leaves (optional)

FOR THE VINAIGRETTE:

- ¼ cup fresh lime or lemon juice
- ½ tsp. grated lime or lemon zest
- ¼ tsp. minced garlic
- ½ tsp. ground cumin

- 2 tsp. finely minced cilantro
- 3 Tbs. olive oil
- ¼ tsp. honey
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper

In a dry saucepan, lightly toast the barley over moderate heat until fragrant, about 5 min., stirring to prevent burning. Add the stock, bring to a boil, reduce the heat, cover, and simmer gently until the liquid is absorbed and the barley is tender, about 40 min. Remove from the heat and let stand, partially

uncovered, until cooled to room temperature before stirring.

Meanwhile, cook the peas in lightly salted boiling water until just tender but not mushy, about 15 min. Drain, cool, and set aside. (If using canned peas, don't cook them, just rinse them well.)

To make the vinaigrette—In a small bowl, whisk together the lime (or lemon) juice, zest, garlic, cumin, cilantro, oil, and honey; add salt and pepper to taste.

In a large glass bowl, layer the barley, peas, roasted pepper, tomato, scallions, and corn. Drizzle the vinaigrette over the salad and toss before serving. If you like, arrange greens on serving plates and top with the salad.

Lemon Rice Salad

A fresh lemon-herb dressing pairs well with the nutty flavor of basmati rice. Cool and gently fluff the basmati before dressing to ensure a light salad. *Yields about 5 cups.*

- ¼ cup minced shallots or scallions (white and green parts)
- 2 Tbs. olive oil
- 1 cup basmati or jasmine rice, well rinsed
- 2 cups rich vegetable or chicken stock
- 1 tsp. grated lemon zest
- 2½ Tbs. fresh lemon juice
- ⅓ cup roughly chopped cilantro, basil, mint, or a mix
- 1 tsp. finely minced garlic
- ½ cup finely diced red onion, rinsed in cold water
- ½ cup diced red bell pepper
- ⅓ cup lightly toasted pine nuts, pepitas, or chopped cashews

In a deep saucepan over moderate heat, sauté the shallots in 1 Tbs. of the olive oil until soft but not brown. Add the rice and continue to sauté for 2 to 3 min. longer, stirring regularly. Add the stock and bring to a boil. Reduce the heat to a simmer, cover, and continue to cook until all the liquid is absorbed,

SOURCES FOR GRAINS

Dean & DeLuca
(800/221-7714)
Catalog Center
2526 E 36th N Circle
Wichita, KS 67219

Gold Mine Natural Foods
(800/475-3663)
3419 Hancock St.
San Diego, CA
92110-4307

Indian Harvest
(800/294-2433)
PO Box 428
Bemidji, MN 56619-0428

3 Give large whole grains an overnight soak. Some grains, like wheatberries and wild rice, will cook in half the usual time if they're soaked overnight or even for a few hours.



4 Or try the "quick soak" method. If you don't have time for a long soak, rinse the grains well and put them in a pan, cover with at least an inch of water, and bring to a boil. Immediately remove the pan from the heat and let sit for an hour or so. Drain, add the cooking liquid, and cook.

5 Store grains properly. The fats in grains turn rancid after a time. In warm or humid climates, store grains in airtight containers in the refrigerator or freezer to extend their shelf life. Label the grains with the date you buy them, and keep them no longer than a year.

6 Cook and freeze grains. You're much more likely to use grains if they're already cooked. Most grains freeze well in airtight containers. I cook grains simply and in fairly large quantities so that I can freeze them and then defrost them quickly to make salads and other dishes.

14 to 16 min.) Remove from the heat and let stand, partially covered, for 5 min. Gently fluff the rice with a fork and pour into a large bowl to cool completely.

Add the lemon zest, juice, herbs, garlic, onion, bell pepper, nuts, and remaining 1 Tbs. of olive oil to the rice and gently stir to combine. If not using immediately, cover and refrigerate for up to three days.

Tabbouleh Salad with Roasted Tomatoes

There's a great debate among cooks from the Middle East about the ratio of bulgur to parsley in a *tabbouleh*. Some say it should be at least 8 parts parsley to 1 part bulgur. In this version, I've used a

bit more bulgur. The California hook in this salad is the sweet and caramelized roasted tomatoes. They're a perfect foil for the lemony-herby *tabbouleh*. Serves four to six.

FOR THE TOMATOES:

3 lb. ripe medium tomatoes, halved and gently seeded

3 Tbs. olive oil

Salt and freshly ground black pepper

FOR THE SALAD:

1/3 cup fine bulgur wheat

1/3 cup rich vegetable stock, chicken stock, or water, heated to boiling

1/4 cup olive oil

1 1/2 cups finely chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley

1/4 cup finely chopped fresh mint

2 Tbs. minced scallion (white and green parts)

1 Tbs. finely minced garlic

3 Tbs. fresh lemon juice

2 tsp. finely grated lemon zest

FOR THE GARNISH:

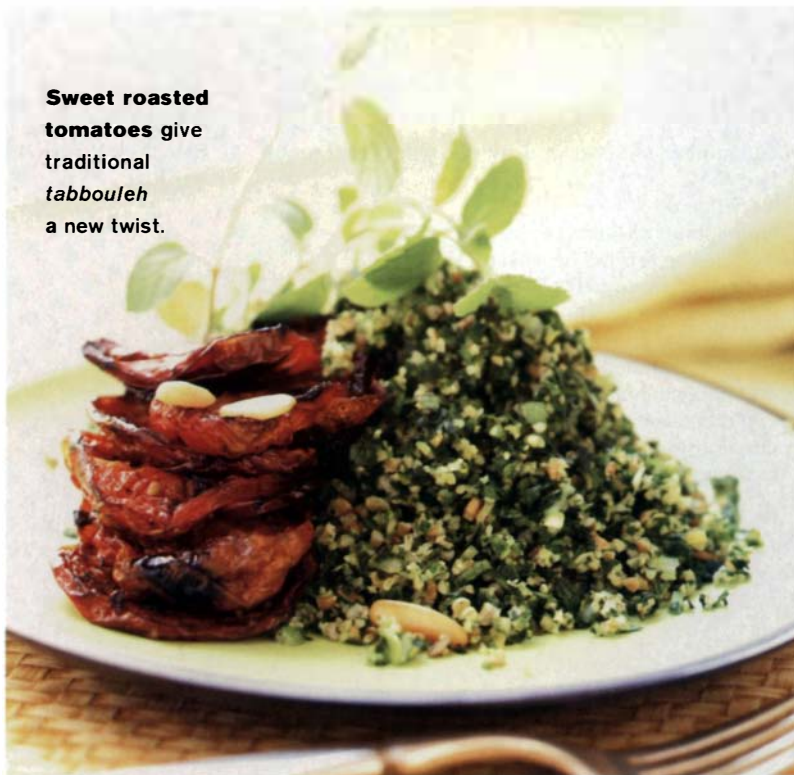
1/4 cup toasted pine nuts

Fresh mint sprigs

To roast the tomatoes—Heat the oven to 350°F. Coat the tomato halves with the olive oil, season them lightly with salt and pepper, and arrange them, cut side down, on a parchment-lined rimmed baking sheet. Roast for about 2 1/2 hours. The tomatoes should be very concentrated and browned, and most of their juices will have cooked off. (The tomatoes can be cooked a day or two ahead and refrigerated; before serving, bring to room temperature.)






To make the salad—In a bowl, combine the bulgur, boiling stock, and half the olive oil; cover and let stand for at least 30 min. Uncover and fluff with a fork. Stir in the remaining olive oil, the parsley, mint, scallion, garlic, lemon juice, and zest. Taste and add salt and pepper as needed.

To serve—Mound the *tabbouleh* in the middle of each plate and arrange the roasted tomatoes around the *tabbouleh*. Garnish with the pine nuts and sprigs of mint.



Sweet roasted tomatoes give traditional *tabbouleh* a new twist.

A guide to cooking grains for salads

Type of grain	 Brown rice (long grain)	 Brown rice (short grain)	 Bulgur (fine or medium grind)	 Couscous	 Millet
Grain to liquid cooking ratio	1 part rice to 2 1/4 parts liquid	1 part rice to 2 parts liquid	1 part bulgur to 1 to 2 parts liquid	1 part couscous to 1 part liquid	1 part millet to 2 parts liquid
Approximate cooking time	45 minutes	35 minutes	Pour boiling liquid over to absorb for 15 to 30 minutes; drain excess.	1 minute cooking, 8 to 10 minutes off the heat (covered)	20 minutes

Summer Wheatberry Salad

Wheatberries have a delicious nutty flavor. Look for ones labeled "soft," which will cook more quickly than the hard variety. *Serves six.*

FOR THE SALAD:

1 cup soft wheatberries
6 cups water (or vegetable or chicken stock) with
½ tsp. salt
1 bay leaf
½ cup chopped artichoke hearts
½ cup quartered cherry tomatoes
¼ cup diced roasted red bell pepper
2 Tbs. capers, drained and chopped
3 Tbs. sliced scallion (white and green parts)
¼ cup sliced almonds, toasted
2 Tbs. chopped fresh basil or cilantro

FOR THE VINAIGRETTE:

½ to 1 tsp. finely minced garlic
2 Tbs. fresh lime juice
1 Tbs. white-wine vinegar
¼ cup fruity olive oil
Salt and freshly ground pepper to taste

FOR THE GARNISH:

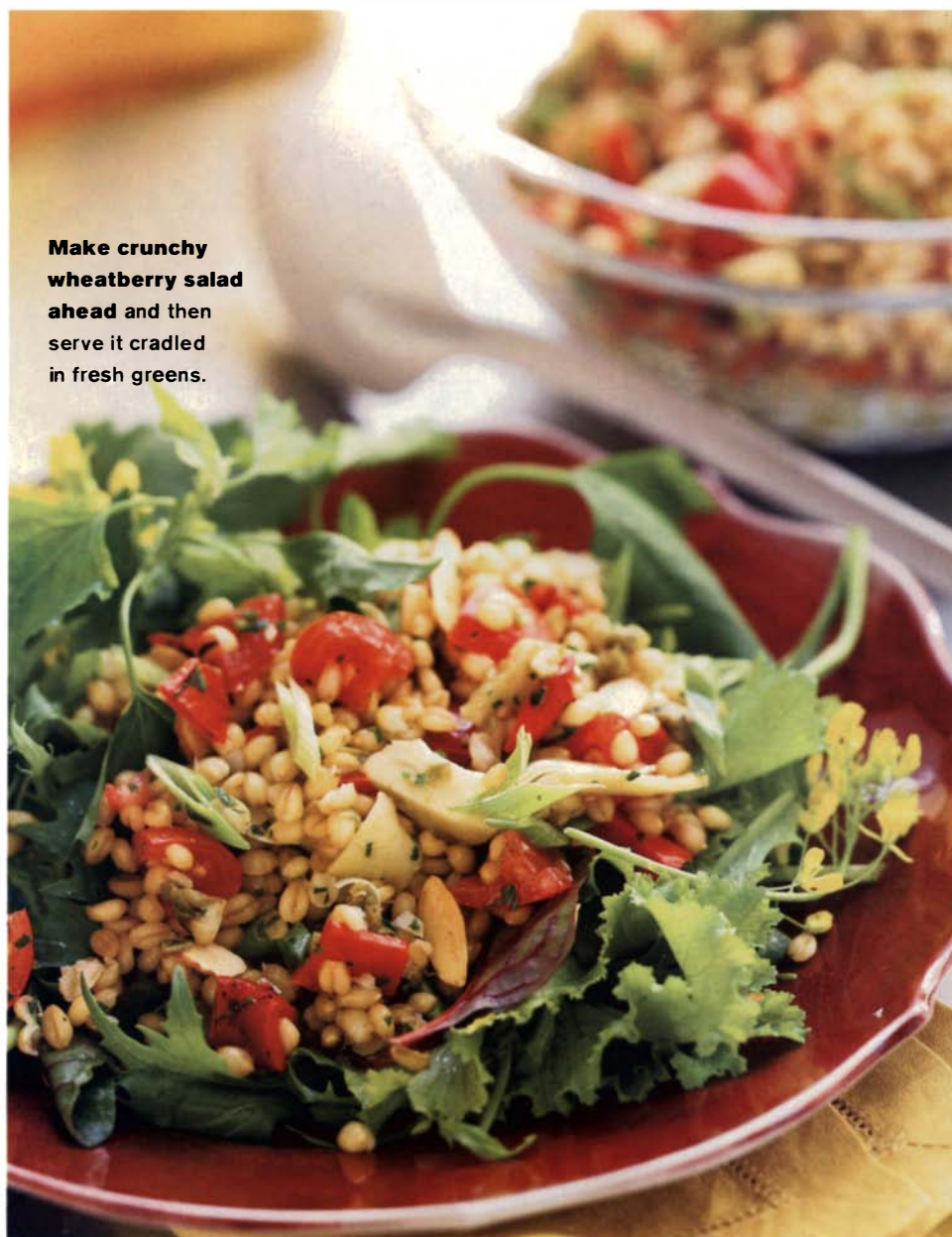
Young greens such as arugula, red mustard, cress, mizuna, or a mix

In a heavy saucepan with a lid, combine the wheatberries, water or stock, salt, and bay leaf. Bring to a boil and then simmer partially covered until the wheatberries are pleasantly chewy, which may take anywhere from 50 to 90 min. Remove the pan from the heat, discard the bay leaf, and let the berries cool in the liquid. When cool, drain off all the liquid and put the berries into a large mixing bowl. Add the artichoke hearts, tomatoes, roasted pepper, capers, scallion, almonds, and basil or cilantro.

Whisk together the garlic, lime juice, vinegar, olive oil, salt, and pepper; toss with the salad. Arrange the greens on chilled plates and top with the salad.

John Ash is the culinary director of Fetzer Vineyards in Hopland, California, and the author of From the Earth to the Table: John Ash's Wine Country Cuisine (Dutton, 1995). ♦

Make crunchy wheatberry salad ahead and then serve it cradled in fresh greens.



Pearled barley

1 part barley to
3 parts liquid

35 to 45 minutes



Quinoa (must
be rinsed well)

1 part quinoa to
2 parts liquid

12 to 15 minutes



Wheatberries
(soft)

1 part wheatberries
to 6 parts liquid

50 to 90 minutes*



White rice
(long grain)

1 part rice to
2 parts liquid

15 to 18 minutes



White rice
(short grain)

1 part rice to
1 ¼ parts liquid

10 to 12 minutes



Wild rice

1 part rice to
3 ½ parts liquid

45 to 50 minutes*

*soaking overnight can reduce cooking time by half and cooking liquid by one third

How to Make the Best Barbecued Ribs

BY PAUL KIRK

A barbecue champ shows how simple spices and slow cooking yield fall-off-the-bone-tender Kansas City style ribs

Whenever I teach a class on barbecue, it seems that all people really want to hear about is ribs. Which are better, beef or pork? Baby back or spare? Kansas City style or St. Louis? A rub or a marinade? Barbecue sauce or no barbecue sauce?

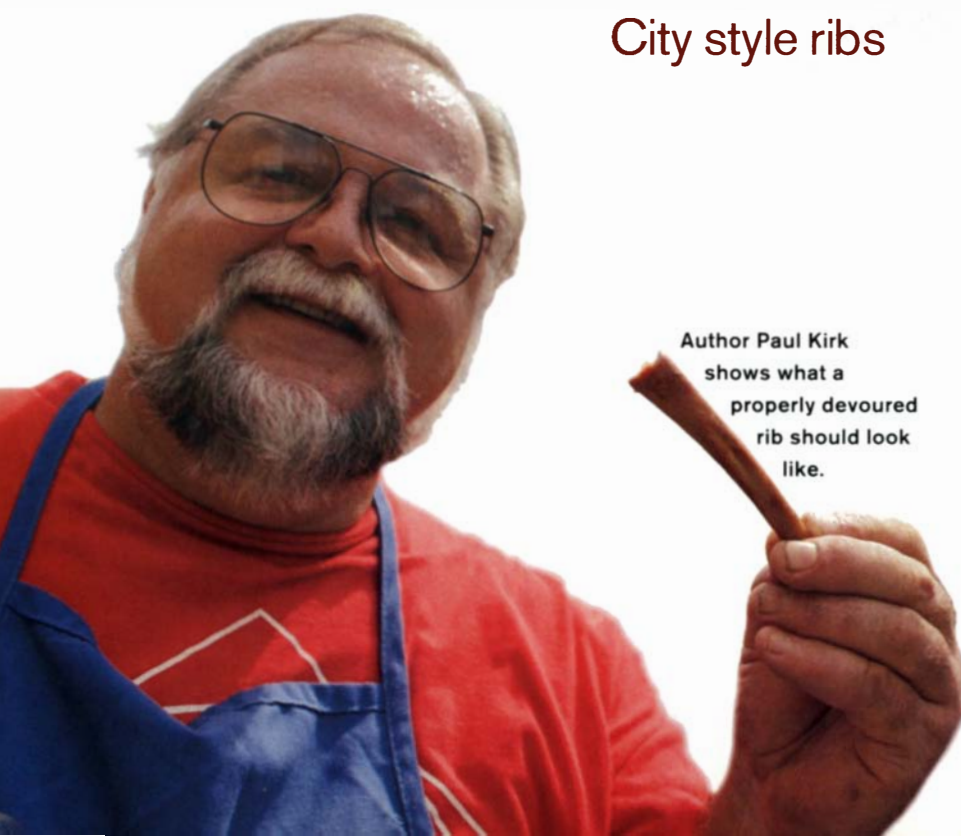
Before I answer, you need to know something about me. Although it's rare in the opinionated world of barbecue, I don't like to force my beliefs on anyone. My terrible jokes, yes; my beliefs, no. Instead, I insist on saying, "This is one successful way to do it." So while I'm giving you a delicious recipe for ribs, I hope that I'm also giving you enough know-how so that you can tinker with the recipe. Because that's the fun of barbecue—always striving to make it better. With that in mind, here are my answers to the questions posed above: pork, spare, Kansas City, rub, and sauce—preferably on the side.

To get the best ribs, make friends with your butcher

Done properly, both baby back ribs (which come from the loin, or back, of the pig) and spareribs (which come from the front part of the belly) are wonderful. But I almost always go for spareribs, which, though a tougher cut, ultimately cook up more juicy and tender. The more expensive baby backs take less time to cook, but their more delicate nature makes them easier to overcook.

When buying ribs, look for the most meat coverage. I don't want to see any bones popping out while I'm barbecuing (we call those ribs "shiners"). And while some fat on the ribs is fine, avoid those

Author Paul Kirk shows what a properly devoured rib should look like.





with huge globs of it. But my best piece of advice for buying ribs is for you to become friendly with the butcher at the grocery store, preferably a store that has a good meat selection. This way, when you ask to special-order a case of ribs, he or she will be more accommodating.

The reward for trimming your own ribs: the tasty tips. We barbecuers consider a slab of ribs to be about a dozen ribs, but the Department of Agriculture says nine bones or more make a slab—all the more reason to get to know your butcher.

I like to buy full slabs of ribs so I can trim them myself. Trimming doesn't take long, and you get to keep the tasty, tender, boneless rib tips that some butchers trim off. You also get the skirt, a meaty flap that starts at the large end of the slab and curves down to the bottom of the slab. (A Kansas City style rack always includes the skirt. Some butchers trim it off, however, which turns the rack into St. Louis style ribs.)

When you get your rack or slab home, you'll want to trim off any excess fat and remove the membrane that runs the length of the bone side of the rack (see the illustrations on p. 42). If you don't remove this membrane, your smoke and seasoning won't penetrate the ribs nearly as well. And if you've ever eaten barbecued ribs and got something that felt like plastic wrap stuck between your teeth, you know the other reason that the membrane should come off.

Give the ribs a rub. A good rub begins with equal amounts of sugar and salt; add to this chili seasoning and black pepper in equal amounts, plus

paprika for color and you've got your basic rub. The final four ingredients in the rub recipe on p. 42 are where you can have fun playing, substituting and adding your favorite dried herbs and spices.

By the way, chili seasoning (also called chili powder) is chile powder (note the *e* at the end of chile in this case, meaning ground dried chiles) that's combined with other dried herbs and spices. It's a tried-and-true seasoning for meat and one I build on in many rub recipes. As you get more into barbecuing, you may want to make your own chili seasoning, starting with pure chile powder or even dried chiles, which you grind yourself.

Indirect cooking for tender ribs

Indirect cooking means the ribs are cooked slowly by smoke over a fire that has burned down to coals. The most delicious spareribs will take at least five hours to cook. That may seem like a long time, but if you set up your barbecue as the recipe on p. 42 directs, you don't need to do much to the ribs once they're cooking. The main thing is to check the temperature inside the grill with a thermometer, one that came with the grill or one you rig yourself through an air vent. The temperature should hover between 230° and 250°F. You can adjust the temperature of the grill by allowing more or less air in through the vents. *(Continued)*

Lip-smackin', finger-lickin'-good ribs. Cut the slabs into individual ribs with a knife or cleaver.

The fuel is also the flavor. It stands to reason that if whatever you're barbecuing is cooked by the heat of the coals and the flavor of the smoke, the smoke and coals should help the flavor, not hurt it. I like a mix of charcoal and hardwood chips; this gives me the benefit of the control of charcoal and the flavor of wood.

Use a good-quality charcoal with as few additives as possible. Even better, try using lump hardwood charcoal (see Sources p. 82), which burns cleaner though hotter. As for the wood chips, most people think we barbecuers always use hickory. But I find hickory can be harsh, especially when used alone. I

prefer to use some pieces of apple and oak, which I don't bother soaking.

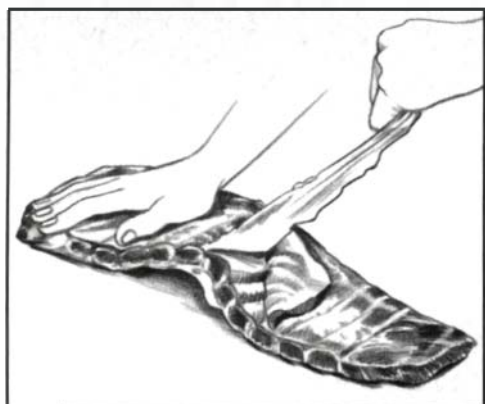
To start the fire, you can use a barbecue chimney (my preferred method), an electric starter, kindling, or a blowtorch. Just stay away from chemical starters, which can give your food a chemical flavor.

A water pan keeps the meat from drying out. I always cook ribs on the grill over a pan full of water. Aside from acting as a drip pan, the water adds moisture to the mix, keeping the ribs juicy. I use a bread pan I found at a tag sale for 25 cents, but a disposable aluminum pan would do the trick.

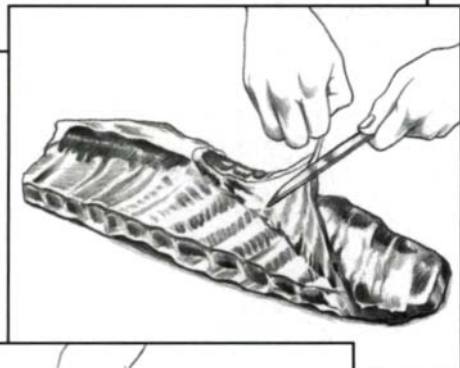
RECIPE

How to trim a rack of ribs

Start by scraping away any excess fat with a small knife. A little fat is fine, but too much will cause your fire to flare up.



Pull off the tough membrane on the bone side. Cut a horizontal slit in the membrane just below the rib tips. Wiggle your finger beneath the membrane to get it loosened and then pull.



Find the skirt—the meaty flap that curves down the bottom of the bone side—and trim off the thick white membrane on its edge.



Cut off the rib tips—but save them for the grill. Cutting off the tips just makes the ribs easier to handle—you won't have this floppy part sitting on top. Feel where the first large rib bone ends and cut horizontally. This shouldn't be a struggle—you're cutting cartilage, not bone.

Kansas City Style Barbecued Ribs

If ribs are the main part of your meal, figure a slab will feed two to three people. If you're serving other grilled or barbecued food, you can figure on less. (Of course, everyone's going to want the ribs.) The rub and the sauce make easily enough for four slabs, but your grill may not be able to accommodate that many. To cook more ribs on a small space, either use a rib rack or coil the slabs as shown in the photo opposite.

2 to 4 slabs of spareribs, preferably with tips attached

FOR THE RUB:

¼ cup packed light brown sugar
¼ cup sugar
¼ cup seasoned salt
2 Tbs. garlic salt
1 Tbs. onion salt
1½ tsp. celery salt
¼ cup sweet Hungarian paprika
1 Tbs. chili powder or seasoning
1 Tbs. freshly ground black pepper
1½ tsp. rubbed dried sage
½ tsp. ground allspice
¼ tsp. cayenne
Pinch ground cloves

FOR THE SAUCE:

⅓ cup packed dark brown sugar
¼ cup white vinegar; more to taste
2 Tbs. Worcestershire sauce
1 Tbs. prepared yellow mustard
1 Tbs. chili powder or seasoning
1½ tsp. freshly ground black pepper
½ tsp. ground ginger
¼ tsp. ground allspice
¼ tsp. cayenne
⅛ tsp. ground mace
2 Tbs. honey
2 cups tomato ketchup

To make the rub—Spread the light brown sugar on a baking sheet and let it dry out for an hour or two to keep it from clumping. Sift the brown sugar and the remaining rub ingredients together in a bowl; you may have to do this in batches. Stir to combine. (Alternatively, put the ingredients in the food processor and pulse to combine.)

To make the sauce—In a large saucepan, combine all the sauce ingredients. Heat over medium, stirring well to mix and dissolve the spices. Reduce the heat and simmer the sauce, uncovered, for 30 min., stirring occasionally.

To prepare the ribs—Refer to the illustrations opposite. Remove the thick membrane covering the bone side of the slab: Separate the membrane at one end of the slab by slitting it with a knife and forcing your fingers underneath it. Pull it down the length of the slab and discard it. Find the skirt—the meaty flap that curves down the bottom of the meat side—and trim off the thick membrane on its edge. Using a sharp knife, cut off the rib tips, cutting parallel to the bottom of the slab. Cut the rib tips into several pieces. Sprinkle the spice rub amply over both sides of the ribs and tips.

To prepare the fire—Using a chimney starter, light 40 to 50 pieces of good-quality lump charcoal. When the coals are glowing, remove them from the starter and stack them on one side of the grill. (If you don't have a chimney starter, stack the charcoal around

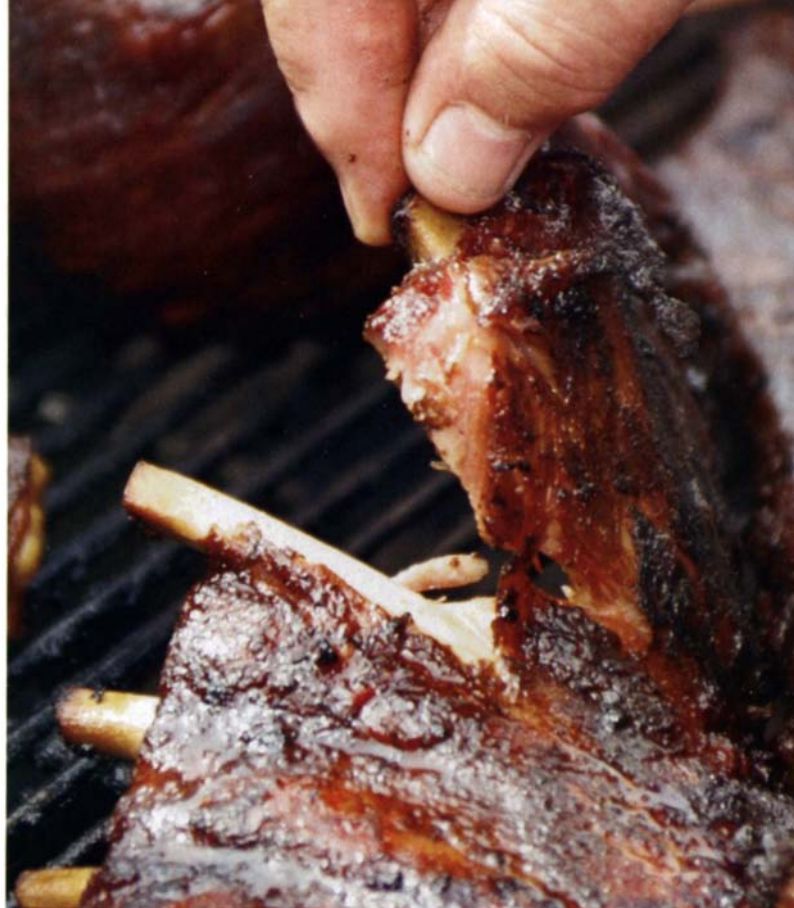


To fit more ribs on the grill, coil the rack and secure with a long skewer. These will cook just as well as ribs laid flat, but they may look a little blotchy where the ribs have overlapped.

some crumpled newspaper in a pyramid on one side of the grill and light the newspaper. The coals will be hot in 20 to 30 min.)

Add 3 or 4 hand-size pieces of apple or oak hardwood, preferably a little of both, to the stack of coals. Put a pie pan full of water next to the coals. Position the grate so that one of the holes is over the coals so you can add coals and wood chips as needed; otherwise, you'll have to lift the grate.

When the coals are about 90% white, position the ribs on the grill anywhere but directly over the coals. Cover the grill with the lid, making sure that the air vent is on the side away from the fire. Cook the ribs for about 2 hours, maintaining a temperature of 230° to 250°F by adjusting the air vents on the grill as needed. (Opening the vents lets in more oxygen



Long, slow grilling is the key to great ribs. They're ready to eat when you can easily pull them apart from one another.

and raises the temperature.) Add more coal if the temperature drops below 230°F. (You'll likely need to add 15 to 20 coals about 30 minutes after putting the ribs on.)

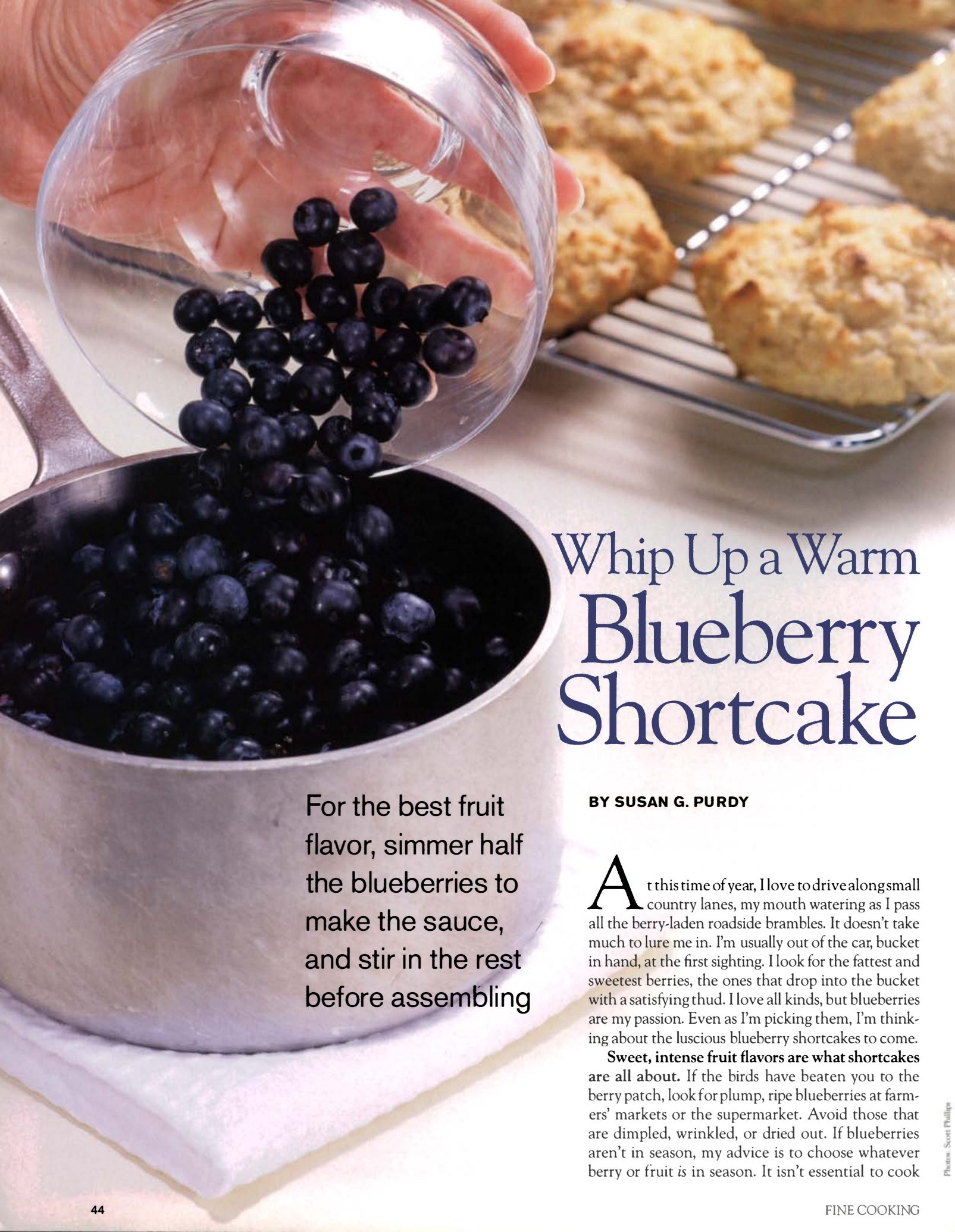
After about 2 to 2½ hours, turn the ribs over. Add some more coals and a few more pieces of hardwood to the fire. Continue cooking the ribs about another 2 hours. To see if the ribs are done to perfection, take off one of the tip pieces and taste it. You can also tug on one of the ribs; if the meat is cooked, you should be able to pull the rib away with ease (see the photo above).

If you want to glaze the meat with the barbecue sauce while they're cooking, pour some of the sauce into a separate container (to avoid contaminating the whole batch) and brush it on both sides of the ribs about every 15 min. during the last half hour of cooking. Alternatively, you can serve all of the sauce on the side.

Remove the ribs from the grill and let them sit for about 10 min. Cut the slabs into individual ribs and serve hot with extra barbecue sauce on the side.

You can also freeze the ribs in the slab for future great eating. Allow them to cool, wrap them in ample plastic wrap, and freeze. For best results, allow them to defrost in the refrigerator before reheating them in a 225°F oven for about an hour. I reheat mine right in the plastic wrap with no trouble at that low temperature. But you can also reheat them unwrapped in a foil-covered pan. If you want to reheat them on the grill, wrap them in foil.

Paul Kirk, author of Paul Kirk's Championship Barbecue Sauces (Harvard Common Press, 1998), lives in Shawnee Mission, Kansas—a hop, skip, and a jump from Kansas City. ♦



Whip Up a Warm Blueberry Shortcake

BY SUSAN G. PURDY

For the best fruit flavor, simmer half the blueberries to make the sauce, and stir in the rest before assembling

At this time of year, I love to drive along small country lanes, my mouth watering as I pass all the berry-laden roadside brambles. It doesn't take much to lure me in. I'm usually out of the car, bucket in hand, at the first sighting. I look for the fattest and sweetest berries, the ones that drop into the bucket with a satisfying thud. I love all kinds, but blueberries are my passion. Even as I'm picking them, I'm thinking about the luscious blueberry shortcakes to come.

Sweet, intense fruit flavors are what shortcakes are all about. If the birds have beaten you to the berry patch, look for plump, ripe blueberries at farmers' markets or the supermarket. Avoid those that are dimpled, wrinkled, or dried out. If blueberries aren't in season, my advice is to choose whatever berry or fruit is in season. It isn't essential to cook

Photos: Scott Phillips

RECIPE

the berries for shortcakes, but I like to simmer at least some of them to create enough juice to seep into the biscuit.

Since flavorful fruit is the star of this show, think of the biscuits as the stage. Some people like sweet southern-style cream biscuits, and others like them spongy and cake-like, but my favorite is an old-fashioned New England drop biscuit with a rustic top and a slightly porous texture.

The key to these biscuits is to minimize gluten development so you get a biscuit with a tender, or "short," crumb. Cutting the butter into the dry ingredients is an important step toward this goal; the fat in the butter coats the protein in the flour, which prevents too many gluten bonds from forming.

As with pie crusts, the rule is to handle the dough as little as possible. Overmixing can toughen the biscuits, so when it's time to add the liquid (usually milk or buttermilk), be sure to mix briefly. Buttermilk works well because its acidity softens the protein in the flour and helps guarantee an extra-tender crumb.

For simplicity's sake, I sometimes prepare the fruit and biscuits a couple of hours ahead, and then I assemble the shortcakes just before serving. But it's also fine—and fun—to let guests build their own.

Blueberry Shortcakes

These biscuits are at their best when served fresh and warm from the oven, topped with fruit and whipped cream, but they also make a fine breakfast, toasted and spread with butter and jam. *Yields 6 shortcakes.*

FOR THE BISCUITS:

8½ oz. (2 cups) sifted all-purpose flour
1 Tbs. baking powder, sifted to remove lumps
¾ tsp. salt
3 Tbs. sugar; more for the glaze
1 Tbs. grated lemon zest
½ tsp. freshly grated (or ground) nutmeg
2 oz. (4 Tbs.) cold unsalted butter, cut in pieces
1 cup buttermilk; more for the glaze

FOR THE BLUEBERRIES:

6 cups (about 2 lb.) blueberries, picked over, rinsed, and patted dry
¼ cup sugar; more to taste
1 Tbs. water
½ tsp. grated lemon zest
¼ tsp. freshly grated nutmeg (optional)
Fresh lemon juice to taste

FOR THE WHIPPED CREAM:

1½ cups heavy cream, chilled
2 Tbs. sugar
1 tsp. vanilla extract

To make the biscuits—Set a rack in the center of the oven; heat to 400°F. Line a baking sheet with parchment or lightly grease it with shortening or cooking spray.

In a large bowl, whisk the flour, baking powder, salt, sugar, lemon zest, and nutmeg. With a pastry blender or your fingertips, cut in the butter until the mixture resembles coarse meal. Gently stir in the buttermilk until the dough just holds together with no large, dry lumps.

Spoon the dough onto the baking sheet in six equal mounds. Brush the tops with buttermilk; sprinkle with sugar. Bake until the peaks have begun to brown and the bottoms are golden, 20 to 25 min. Let rest for 1 min. and then transfer to a wire rack. While still slightly warm, slice them open with a serrated knife.

To make the blueberry filling—Set aside 2 cups of the berries. In a medium, nonreactive saucepan, combine the remaining 4 cups of blueberries, sugar, water, lemon zest, and nutmeg (if using). Cook, uncovered, over medium heat, stirring frequently until very soft and juicy, 6 to 7 min. Remove from the heat. Taste and add lemon juice and more sugar, if necessary. If not using immediately, cover and refrigerate.

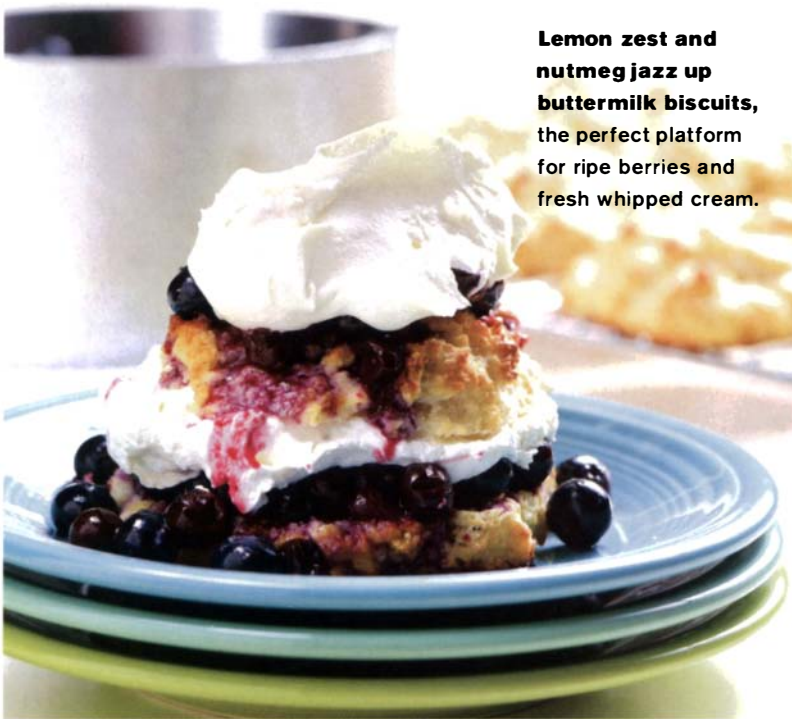
When ready to serve, reheat the blueberry sauce until very warm and stir in the reserved blueberries.

To make the whipped cream—Chill a mixing bowl and beaters for 30 min. In the bowl, combine the heavy cream, sugar, and vanilla. Whip until medium peaks form and the beaters leave tracks on top of the cream.

To assemble—Put the bottom half of each biscuit on a plate. Spoon on about ½ cup of the blueberry mixture and a few dollops of cream. Cover with the biscuit top. Spoon on more blueberries and top with another dollop of whipped cream. Serve immediately, passing any remaining blueberry mixture at the table.

Susan G. Purdy is the author of Let Them Eat Cake (William Morrow, 1997). ♦

Lemon zest and nutmeg jazz up buttermilk biscuits, the perfect platform for ripe berries and fresh whipped cream.





Picking the Proper Mixing Tool for Every Job

Stirring, whisking, blending, beating, folding—there are lots of ways to mix ingredients, and lots of tools you can use to mix them, depending on the results you want. From a simple wooden spoon to a high-powered, high-ticket stand mixer, each tool performs in a specific way that has a specific effect on ingredients. Which is why, depending on the task, certain mixing tools work better than others.

Simple hand tools are favorites of the pros

Rubber spatulas, wooden spoons, and whisks are so commonplace that it might seem silly to even mention them. But these inexpensive, all-purpose faithfuls are the desert-island choices of every professional chef and food stylist I spoke to because they're easy to use and perfectly engineered for many jobs.

Wooden spoons are inexpensive, simple, and heat resistant. They come flat, angled, bowled, and round-edged, and in various sizes. Wooden spoons are sturdy enough for smashing aromatic ingredients such as citrus zest and herbs to release their aromas and flavors, and the spoon's curved bowl is perfect for smearing cookie dough against the sides of the bowl as you mix. Use them for stirring thick risotto, sauces, stews, and custards. The rounded edge is gentler on ingredients—and on pans—than a metal spoon. And a wooden spoon's relatively rough surface is superior to metal for tasks like creaming butter and sugar, says Molly Stevens, a contributing editor to *Fine Cooking*, because the wood's slightly rough surface helps cut air into the butter that turns it light and fluffy when you cream

Whether it's stirring polenta, creaming cookie dough, or making a vinaigrette, every cooking task gets done easier, better, faster with the right tool

BY AMY ALBERT

it. And just about every cook I know likes the simple comfort of a wooden spoon's handcrafted feel.

Rubber spatulas also come in several sizes. The wide-paddled blade pushes and lifts ingredients and gently cuts through airy mixtures. The spatula's design is perfect for gently folding soufflés, sponge cake batter, foos, and meringues. And the flexible paddle's rounded edges make a rubber spatula the best scraper around, especially if it bugs you to leave the last bits of batter in the mixing bowl. You can even buy heatproof rubber spatulas, perfect for scrambling eggs and fluffing frittatas. Look for the gently scooped model by Le Creuset, which comes in bright colors, or the stiffer, long-handled version by Rubbermaid.

Whisks combine and they can aerate, too. The spaced wires agitate and disperse ingredients in several spots at once, while the area in between lets air into whatever you're mixing. A whisk's wires may be thin and flexible (ideal for whipping) or thick and rigid (useful for stirring and preventing lumps in custards, sauces, and even polenta). The wires should be gathered close together where they meet at the tip for thorough mixing. The handle should be sturdy and sealed off so water doesn't get trapped and the wires don't disengage.

- ◆ An *all-purpose whisk*, also called a sauce whisk, ranges from a few inches long to several feet long. Sauce whisks are great for countless tasks, including making mayonnaise and other dressings, where the wires smash oil into the droplets needed to form an emulsion. A sauce whisk is the most versatile, but other types of whisks do special jobs.

- ◆ A *balloon whisk's* full rounded profile gets lots of air into ingredients and is especially good for whipping cream and egg whites.

- ◆ A *flat whisk* (or roux whisk) is nifty for deglazing and blending pan gravy because the flat shape can get into corners and at every bit at the bottom of a shallow pan or skillet.

An **egg beater** has no redeeming value except quaintness. Hang it on your kitchen pegboard for eye-catching decoration, and use a whisk.

Mixers are a baker's choice

Mixers are the motorized version of a whisk: they combine ingredients and can aerate them, too. They're quicker, higher-powered, and require less arm strength than a whisk, but mixers don't offer quite as much finesse and hands-on control as a whisk.

A **hand mixer** is great for whipping cream, egg whites, frosting, cookie doughs—and mashed potatoes, too, provided you go easy so they don't get gummy. As with a hand blender, you're bringing the mixer to the food, so cleanup is minimal—just a rinse of the beaters. If you like baking, be sure to buy a hand mixer with enough oomph (175 to 220 watts)



A hand mixer is a mechanized whisk. Cleanup is easy—just rinse the beaters.

to take on dense cookie dough and thick chocolate frostings. Susan Ehlich, a food stylist in New York City, likes KitchenAid's hand mixer. "It isn't as powerful as a stand mixer, but it has a good range of speeds for cookie doughs, going from very low for gentle stirring to very fast for finishing with a thorough beating." KitchenAid makes hand mixers with six, seven, and nine speeds. Trailing a cord can be cumbersome and oomphier models can be heavy, so if it's a choice between a hand mixer and a stand mixer, ask yourself how much whipped cream, cookie



A stand mixer frees up your hands to add ingredients as it mixes.

dough, frosting, and ganache you actually do. A good hand mixer will run you \$50 to \$90.

As for the beaters, “Flat-edged beaters seem to get at the food better than the spindly ones,” says Anne Disrude, a food stylist in New York. But the trend seems to be toward these spindly beaters, so again, be sure the motor has enough power.

A **stand mixer** is a wooden spoon or a whisk in its mechanized, most powerful form. With paddle, hook, and whisk attachments, you’re set for crusty peasant bread, buttery brioches, delicate layer cakes, creamy frostings, and large batches of mayonnaise.



An immersion blender lets you take the mixer right to the food. It’s great for whipping air into sauces just before serving.

For busy cooks, having your hands free is one of the most appealing features of a stand mixer. You can beat the egg whites for a meringue or a soufflé while you prepare other ingredients.

Most stand mixers come with bowls in capacities of about 3½ to 5 quarts. KitchenAid is a favorite among chefs I polled, because the shape of the mixing bowl and reach of the dough hook make for more thorough mixing than other models. Abby Dodge, *Fine Cooking*’s test kitchen director, has a very personal relationship with her five-quart KitchenAid Heavy Duty. “He’s strong and big enough for nine dozen cookies, two loaves of French bread, or one ten-inch cheesecake,” she says. Dodge advises that, “If you’re a die-hard baker and you have to make a choice, stick to your chef’s knife for chopping and choose a stand mixer over a food processor.”

Stiffer bread doughs that need lengthy, vigorous mixing can cause a mixer to slink, sidle, or gallop across the counter. Most cooks deal with this by keeping an eye and a hand on the machine. Maggie Glezer, who is writing a book on artisan breadmaking in America, suggests putting towels underneath “to serve as shock absorbers. Or,” says Glezer, “just stop and rest for a few moments—your dough will be just fine.” You’ll often find certain models on sale, but expect to spend \$250 to \$450 for a KitchenAid.

A **Magic Mill** is a heavy-duty all-purpose mixer that kneads up to 15 pounds of bread dough with its roller attachment. Several impassioned *Fine Cooking*

Depending on the mixing task, a whisk can out-finesse a machine.

readers have written in to rave about the Magic Mill. It comes with attachments for whisking, blending, grinding, and juicing, as well as for making pasta and sausage. If you’re a serious baker who turns out several loaves a week, you might consider one of these, but if you just want your hands free while you whip egg whites or start cake batter, stick to a stand mixer. The Magic Mill is big, it’s heavy, and it rings in at \$499.

Blenders—hand and stand

A blender mixes with small, whirring, pronged blades. While most cooks use a blender to chop, purée, and liquefy, many find that both an immersion blender and a stand blender are really useful mixing tools.



A stand blender handles more than margaritas.
It's perfect for mixing mayonnaise and vinaigrettes, too.

An immersion blender is a lightweight, portable version of its big brother, the stand blender. This mixer on a wand has been the secret weapon of restaurant chefs for years, and now lightweight home models are available.

"The immersion blender sits right in the middle of our kitchen, and everyone's always reaching for it," says Joanne Chang, a pastry chef at Payard Pâtisserie in Manhattan. She counts on it for lump-free pastry cream, for "supersmooth ganache and custards," and to quickly mix large quantities of egg wash for dozens of croissants. Jim Peterson, a contributing editor to *Fine Cooking*, likes his immersion blender for whipping a little frothiness into cream-based or butter sauces just before serving. An immersion blender is a cinch to clean—just run it under the faucet—and cordless models by Sanyo and Cuisinart eliminate the bother of a trailing cord. It's essential, of course, to make sure the blender is turned off and has stopped rotating before you put it in or take it out of whatever you're mixing; otherwise, you'll end up with expressionist splatter all over you and your kitchen walls. Expect to spend \$30 to \$50.

Stand blenders mix in a closed container with small, pronged blades and violent tossing action.

They're great for mixing vinaigrettes, mayonnaise, and other emulsified dressings. And because of the jug container, they handle liquid well and they're easy to pour from. Blenders can range from \$40 to \$150.

Your food processor can mix, too

A food processor's sharp, spinning S-shaped blade chops, grinds, purées, and liquefies. It's the tool you probably like best for pulverizing pesto, grinding nuts and breadcrumbs, and chopping chocolate. But a food processor is a mixing tool, too.

"It takes the mystery out of making smooth, emulsified vinaigrettes—much quicker and easier than whisking," says Lucia Watson, chef-owner of Lucia's in Minneapolis. Joanne Chang uses a food processor to repair broken ganache, spinning small amounts at a time. And Susan Purdy, author of *Let Them Eat Cake* and *Easy as Pie*, loves her processor for pie crusts and tart doughs. "But pulsing is essential," she says. "You have to be careful not to overwork the dough."

For kneading bread dough, "you'll get a more flavorful result than with a stand mixer because the dough is being flipped around less, and in less danger of getting oxidized and bleached out," says Charles van Over, author of *The Best Bread Ever*, an award-winning book based on food-processor kneading with the metal blade. For home bakers, van Over recommends buying a processor with a capacity of at



A food processor cuts cold butter quickly to mix tart and cracker doughs in seconds.

least 11 cups. A machine that size will cost \$250 to \$350, but smaller models start under \$150.

See Sources, p. 82, for names and numbers of mixing tool manufacturers.

Amy Albert is an associate editor for *Fine Cooking*. ♦

Sizzling Tropical Sauces For Grilled Food

When I moved to Key West in the early 1970s, I discovered a lively sauce called a *mojo* that jazzed up everything from french fries to grilled fish. A little bit like a warm vinaigrette, but bursting with bold flavors such as fragrant garlic, hot chiles, and the juices of tropical fruits, *mojo* (pronounced MOE-HOE) was an exciting sauce for a young cheflike me. Not only did I love the fresh flavors, but I liked the fact that *mojo* was a “multicultural sauce” (see the sidebar on p. 53). I’d been looking for a way to expand my cooking style and get away from the dominance of French sauces. I was happy to find in *mojos* a family of fresh-tasting sauces that got its distinctive personality from the ingredients of the New World.

Since my early days in Key West, I’ve made a lot of *mojo*. Over the years, in my restaurant and at home, I’ve created my own *mojo* variations that I think pair especially well with grilled food. My *mojos* are always boldly seasoned (I’m fond of the hot-sweet complexity of habanero chiles, for example) but balanced as well. I think *mojos* taste best when they’re freshly made, slightly warm, and have had a chance to mingle with the juices of meat or vegetables that have just finished cooking. At the same time, I think *mojos* are too overwhelming for raw food or delicate lettuces, so try not to think of them as regular vinaigrettes. And while I love to make *mojos* for warm-weather grilling, they work just as well in winter, paired with a roast chicken or a sautéed fish fillet.

I’ve included recipes here for three of my favorite *mojos* for grilled food. I love the way tropical fruits and hot chiles work together, so I created a luscious mango and habanero *mojo*—a simple purée

that doesn’t mask the flavor of fresh, grilled seafood like tuna, grouper, or shrimp.

One of my family’s favorite *mojos* is my “Mo J.” We make a lot of this garlicky, cumin-scented *mojo*, use half of it to marinate flank steak or chicken, and reserve the other half to drizzle on as a sauce when the meat comes off the grill. This *mojo* is made much the way a traditional *mojo* was: hot oil is poured over fresh garlic and spices, both to cook the edge off the garlic and to infuse the oil with all the flavors of the *mojo*.

And the third *mojo* recipe has Asian influences, including ingredients like fresh ginger and soy sauce,

inspired by the Chinese immigrants who contributed their flavors and ingredients to the New World when they came to Cuba in the mid-1900s to work as laborers in the sugar and railway industries. I like to pair this *mojo* with grilled shiitakes and somen noodles.

My *mojos* all vary slightly in technique, but they’re not hard to make. The Mango Habanero *Mojo* comes together easily in a blender. When I can, I make my “Mo J” in a *molcajete* (a big stone mortar; it’s pronounced mohl-kah-HAY-tay) as a tradi-

tional *mojo* might have been made, but I also use a food processor just as successfully. In my *Mojo Oriental*, I add the finely chopped aromatics to the liquid ingredients before the whole mixture is heated. All three of these can be made and refrigerated ahead (the “Mo J” and *Mojo Oriental* will keep well for several days; the Mango Habanero *Mojo* is best used the day it’s made). Once you make these recipes with the food I’ve suggested, try making a *mojo* to serve with steamed vegetables or roasted chicken, or your own favorite food from the grill. (Continued)

Make a *mojo*—
an easy sauce
bursting with the
flavors of the
Caribbean

BY NORMAN VAN AKEN



A classic *mojo* starts with a mortar and pestle. Here, garlic, chiles, and spices are ground in a *molcajete*, but a food processor works well, too.



Sizzling oil takes the edge off the garlic and warms the spices, releasing their flavors.



Half of the “Mo J” *mojo* is used to marinate the steak; the other half is drizzled on as a sauce.



“Power up the blender,” advises Norman Van Aken, to quickly turn sweet, juicy mango and spicy habanero chiles into a delicious *mojo*.

RECIPES

“Mo J” Marinated & Grilled Flank Steak

Toss a few red onions on the grill to serve with this dish; a salad of tomatoes and cucumbers rounds out the meal nicely. My family loves this versatile *mojo* on chicken as well as on flank steak. *Serves four to six.*

FOR THE MOJO:

- 12 cloves garlic (or 4 Tbs. minced garlic)
- 2 habaneros or other spicy chiles, cored, seeded, and minced (wear rubber gloves)
- 1 tsp. kosher salt
- 4 tsp. whole cumin seeds, toasted
- 1 cup olive oil
- $\frac{2}{3}$ cup sour orange juice (or $\frac{1}{3}$ cup fresh lime juice plus $\frac{1}{3}$ cup fresh orange juice)
- $1\frac{1}{2}$ Tbs. sherry vinegar
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste

FOR THE STEAK:

- $1\frac{1}{2}$ lb. flank steak
- 1 or 2 large Bermuda onions, thickly sliced and brushed with olive oil (optional)
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste

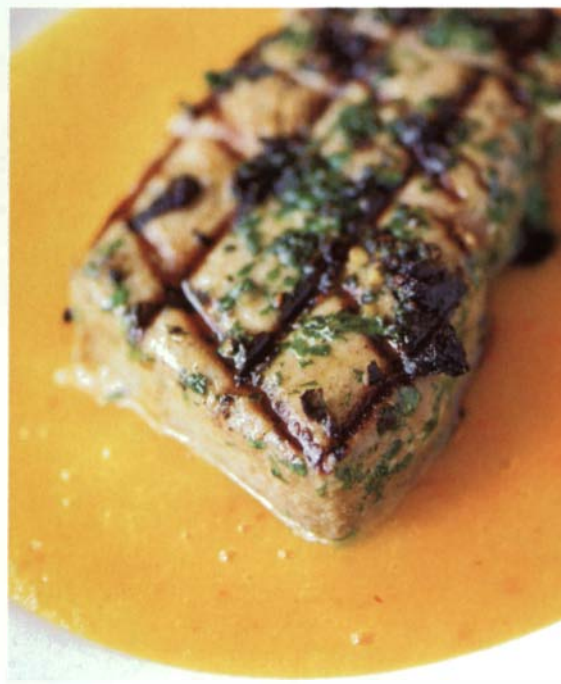
To make the *mojo*—Mash the raw garlic, chiles, salt, and cumin together in a mortar and pestle until fairly smooth. (Alternatively, use a food processor, pulsing until the ingredients are finely chopped but not puréed.) Scrape the mixture into a bowl and set aside.

Heat the olive oil until fairly hot but not smoking, and

pour it over the garlic-chile mixture (the oil should sizzle when it hits the cool ingredients), stir, and let stand 10 min. This will cook the garlic slightly. Whisk in the sour orange juice and vinegar. Season with salt and pepper and set aside to cool completely.

Put the steak in a zip-top bag or a shallow bowl and pour in 1 cup of the cooled *mojo*. Seal and refrigerate for at least 2 hours or overnight, turning occasionally. Refrigerate the remaining 1 cup of *mojo*.

To cook and serve—Light a charcoal or gas grill. When the grill is very hot, remove the steak from the marinade (discard the marinade), pat dry, and season with salt and pepper; cook 5 to 7 min. on one side and 3 to 4 min. on the other for medium rare. Remove from the grill and let rest for 5 min. (If you like, grill the Bermuda onions as well—you can put them on at the same time as the flank steak; grill 6 to 7 min. per side.) Meanwhile, warm the reserved *mojo* over low heat. Slice the flank steak very thinly on the bias and serve with the reserved *mojo* and the grilled onions.



Sweet and spicy Mango Habanero Mojo is the perfect foil for a smoky grilled tuna fillet.

Grilled Tuna Steaks with Mango Habanero Mojo

The floral note of the habaneros is a tremendous partner to the mango, but if you can't find them, substitute another spicy chile. This *mojo* is also delicious with grilled shrimp or pork. *Serves four.*

FOR THE TUNA AND MARINADE:

- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup finely chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup finely chopped fresh cilantro
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup dry sherry
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup olive oil
- 1 tsp. kosher salt; more for seasoning
- Freshly ground black pepper to taste
- 4 tuna steaks, 6 oz. each

FOR THE MOJO:

1 ripe, juicy mango, peeled and pitted
¼ cup Chardonnay or other dry white wine
Juice of ½ orange (about ¼ cup)
½ to ¾ tsp. minced habanero, Scotch bonnet, or other hot chile (seeds removed)

Sprigs of cilantro for garnish

To make the marinade—In a large shallow dish, mix the parsley, cilantro, garlic, sherry, olive oil, salt, and pepper. Add the tuna and toss to thoroughly coat, pressing the herbs all over the steaks. Let sit for 30 min.

To make the *mojo*—In a blender, combine the mango, Chardonnay, and orange juice. Stir in the habanero and set aside. (This *mojo* is served at room temperature or very slightly warmed—don't boil it).

To cook the tuna—Light a charcoal or gas grill. When the grill is very hot, remove the tuna from the marinade and season it with salt and pepper. Sear the tuna for 3 to 5 min. on each side for medium rare (or more, depending on the thickness of the tuna). Drizzle some *mojo* on each plate, set the tuna on the *mojo*, drizzle on a little more *mojo*, and garnish with cilantro.

Grilled Shiitakes with Mojo Oriental & Somen Noodles

Somen noodles are sold in Asian groceries and many supermarkets. Use capellini if you can't find them.

Serves four as a light dinner.

16 large shiitake caps, cut into quarters (or

32 smaller shiitake caps, cut in half)

¼ cup whole cumin seeds

½ tsp. Sichuan peppercorns (optional)

2 cups homemade or low-salt canned chicken stock

¼ cup toasted sesame oil

¼ cup honey

¼ cup soy sauce

¼ cup rice wine vinegar

¼ cup minced fresh ginger

½ habanero chile, seeded

FOR THE SOMEN NOODLES:

8 oz. dried somen noodles

1 Tbs. toasted sesame oil



Minced garlic chives or chives for garnish (optional)

Black and white sesame seeds for garnish (optional)

Thread the shiitake caps on 8 short wooden skewers. Arrange the skewers in a shallow, nonreactive pan.

To make the *mojo*, toast the cumin and peppercorns in a dry saucepan over medium-high heat until they're quite aromatic. Grind them in a spice or coffee grinder and return them to the pan. Add the stock, sesame oil, honey, soy sauce, vinegar, ginger, and habanero. Bring to a boil and reduce to a simmer. After 5 min., remove the habanero; continue to simmer the sauce until it's reduced to 1½ cups, about another 10 min. Remove from the heat and strain the sauce through a fine sieve; let cool slightly. Pour the *mojo* over the shiitake skewers; let sit at room temperature for 30 min. to 2 hours.

Light a grill or broiler. Remove the skewers from the *mojo*, letting any excess drip back into the pan. Transfer the *mojo* to a nonreactive saucepan and simmer until reduced to about ½ cup. Meanwhile, grill or broil the shiitakes until well-browned, 3 to 6 min.

Boil the somen noodles until just *al dente* (about 1 min. after the water comes back to a boil), drain well, and toss with the sesame oil. Mound the noodles in four shallow bowls, top with the grilled shiitake skewers, and drizzle with the reduced *mojo*.

Mojo Oriental—
an intense
infusion of
spices, soy,
honey, ginger,
and sesame—
brings together
a dish of grilled
shiitakes and
somen noodles.

The well-travelled *mojo*

According to my friend Maricel Presilla, a food historian who grew up in Cuba and is writing a book on the cooking traditions of Latin America, *mojo* (from the Spanish *mojar*, "to moisten") originated in Spain and came to the New World with the Spanish invaders, who carried it all over Latin America. *Mojo* then made its way to the Spanish Caribbean, including Cuba and the Dominican Republic.

Typically, a *mojo* was a boldly

seasoned vinaigrette-type sauce that was heated to infuse its flavors. With the generous flavors of garlic, chiles, and herbs, and the tenderizing effect of an oil- and acid-based medium (the acid was often vinegar or citrus juice), *mojo* was traditionally used to moisten, marinate, and flavor dry foods like starchy tubers or well-cooked meats.

As *mojo* travelled through the New World, it changed to suit the ingredients of different regions. For

example, Cubans infused *mojo* with the juice of a sour orange to create their ubiquitous sauce, *mojo criollo* (*criollo* means hand-made but implies "made with love"), which is drizzled on roast pig and other barbecued meats.

Mojo picked up tropical chiles and fruits in the Caribbean, as well as the spices of different immigrant groups. By the time I encountered *mojo* in Key West, it wasn't just one *mojo*, but a big family of *mojos*.

Norman Van Aken,
the executive chef of
Norman's in Miami,
is the author of
Norman's New
World Cuisine
(Random House,
1997). ♦

A Cooking Vacation

For the price of a trip to Toledo, you can spend a week in France, exploring markets and cooking for friends and family

BY MARTHA HOLMBERG

When I go on a vacation, especially to another country, the first places I visit are what I consider to be the most important cultural sites—the food markets. Whether a corner mom-and-pop grocery or a full-scale open-air market, the place where food is sold is where the action is for me. And when I'm lucky enough to be visiting an area that's a real "gastronomic destination," like France or Italy, seeing fabulous, just-picked or just-cooked food is as soul-satisfying as going to a museum. But if I'm staying in a hotel, the markets can be torture—all those great ingredients and no place to cook them.

Last summer I found a wonderful solution to the dilemma, a solution that not only gave me more of what I wanted from my vacation—the ability to cook all day and eat and drink all night—but a solution that was delivered at a really reasonable price. I rented a house in southern France for a week.

The amazing thing was that I did it totally on the cheap, which is the only way I can afford a vacation of any kind. First of all, I travelled in mid-September, which is heading toward off-season, but in the south of France, mid-September still felt like peak season—deliciously warm weather, active produce markets, and not too many tourists (except for me, of course). My ticket on Air France from New York to Paris was only about \$550 with a 30-day purchase; a friend at work

who was booking a ticket to Toledo, Ohio, at the same time was getting quotes of over \$800. I was able to rent a big, fast Renault diesel sedan through my U.S. travel agent for about \$400 for the week (for the best deals, rent your car before you go).

The best value of all, the part that made the trip so great, was the house I found—a huge, charming, well-equipped beauty set on a quiet dirt lane in the middle of a working vegetable farm. I paid \$300 for the week, about a third of the cost of a local hotel room.

I found the great housing deal through the *gîte rural* system, a government-organized network of private rental properties all over France. Each place is different, but all must meet a certain standard of quality. I've explained how to find and book a *gîte* in Sources on p. 82.

Staying at the house, my friends and I were able to really live the life: early to market every few days to fill our baskets with everything that looked and smelled marvelous: fat farm-raised chickens, raw milk cheeses, rustic loaves of bread in every shape, olives from pea green and pea-sized to big purple succulents, sausages and hams from the nearby Cévennes mountains, and mounds of glossy, taut-skinned fruit and vegetables.

After the marketing spree, we'd go back to the house, first to take a nap, and then to turn the morning's purchases into great food, all washed down by local wine.





The Saturday market in Uzès, France. Clockwise from upper left:

The best stall for olives and capers.

A goat farmer wraps her handmade cheese.

Jars of honey made by local bees.

The day's haul.

Many shops come outside on market day.

A jumble of garlic braids.

Affordable digs are the key



A villa at the price of a Motel 6.

The place we selected was remarkable: a renovated 12th century priory, made of massive honey-colored limestone block. The living space consisted of three large bedrooms, a living room (which could have been another bedroom), a generous dining room outfitted with a long refectory table, a big kitchen that had modern appliances as well as a great stone fireplace, two bathrooms, and of course a chapel. Outside, there



was a walled courtyard draped with wisteria and flanked by massive fig trees. We were only three people, but we could have easily fit eight. Our hosts, a helpful, friendly but discreet couple, lived nearby and gave us all the privacy we needed.

For all this, we paid \$300 for the week, which included linens and basic kitchen equipment.

Not all the *gîte* housing will be as picturesque as ours was, but they'll all be at least personal, quirky, and a very good value.

Strategic thinking makes the market manageable



Set your alarm clock—serious shoppers get moving early.

You need to arrive as the market opens to get the best stuff and to beat the heat, not to mention to get a parking place. You'll need to make a plan before you go, so fix yourself a *café au lait* and grab a pen and paper. Though you'll want to, you can't buy everything.

A good shopping strategy is to develop a generic menu—maybe a cold soup, a salad, a vegetable gratin, roast chicken, fruit tart. You can select the specific type of fruit or vegetable for each dish depending on which market vendor has the most seductive display.

Now check out your kitchen to see what tools you're missing. Most markets have stalls selling kitchen gadgets—not usually the best quality, but cheap and good enough to use for the week.

Aim to be finished with your shopping in time to sit in a café in the market square, enjoy a mid-morning *express* and croissant, and watch the world go by—remember, you're on vacation.



Look around before you start buying.

The first table you see might have some good-looking melons, but around the corner may be the actual melon farmer herself, offering a taste of the sweetest Cavaillons for half the price of the first lot.

Some of the sellers at the markets are just that—sellers of other people's produce, not all of it local or even French. Try to find the people who look like they're the growers or the cheesemakers or the beekeepers. You'll usually see a sign that says "*producteur*" (producer).



And plan your route so that you buy the more perishable items last:

dairy, meat, and certainly fish. Some fishmongers will give you a little bag of ice, but on a hot day, it won't last long.



Learn some protocol and keep your cool.

The hubbub and crowds of a bustling market can be a bit intimidating, but if you learn a few basic skills, you can assert yourself in a way that will get you good service—and maybe even a sample tasting.

Perhaps the most important point is that at most market stalls, you don't serve yourself. You just tell the vendor how much of what you want.

Try to learn the names of the foods you're likely to buy (they'll all be labeled, of course). And if you're worried about your rusty French, try body language. The French are great gesticulators, so communication is possible with only a few words and a friendly smile.





Get a grip on metrics and on money.

If you don't know the metric system, at least learn that 500g is about 1 pound, and then work up or down from there. And don't take your 200g of shallots and then reach into your bag for your traveller's checks. Get yourself a walletful of small bills and coins before you start shopping.



Look for cool things besides food.

Big markets can be great sources for flowers, antique linens, olive oil and lavender soaps, funky oilcloths for the kitchen table, and of course baskets.



Come prepared to tote your loot.

For just a little shopping, a string bag is brilliant, since it weighs nothing and expands to fit your purchases. For more stuff, a backpack is nice; it leaves your hands free and can support heavier items (though it doesn't look very "local"). If you're going to be around for a week or so, get a shopping trolley, one of those vertical grocery baskets on wheels. It may make you feel like the little old lady in apartment 3B, but you can really pile in the stuff without breaking your back, and using a trolley leaves your hands free to point, taste, and pay.

Martha Holmberg is the editor of *Fine Cooking*. ♦

Relaxed menus ensure enjoyable evenings



From left:

Roast chicken with lemon and garlic, rosemary roasted potatoes, and a gratin of eggplant, zucchini, and tomatoes.

The owners of the *gîte*, M. and Mme. Audema, sip some local wine with the author and *Fine Cooking* art director Steve Hunter.

A no-cook dessert of cheese and grapes.



MASTER CLASS

Twice-Baked



Twice-baked means twice as good. This spinach soufflé is light and airy inside, but the second baking in a sauce creates a savory, satisfying crust.

Want to see this in action?

Check out our video on making twice-baked soufflés on our web site.
<http://finecooking.com>

Soufflés

BY ANNE WILLAN

Baked in a cheese sauce to serve bubbling hot, these soufflés offer all the delight of the classic dish without the last-minute timing dilemma

The thought of a soufflé always makes me smile. So puffy, so pretty, so...daring—will it really rise? Yet despite its reputation as being a difficult dish to execute, a soufflé is quick to make. Most recipes need only a few components, including a white sauce as a base and some flavoring ingredients, usually cheese, fish, or a vegetable (in this article I'm making a spinach version). But there's a catch: almost all soufflés must be prepared at the last minute.

Not this twice-baked soufflé, however, which is why I love it. First, the spinach mixture is baked in individual molds, rising high like a classic soufflé. Then, when left to cool, the soufflés shrink back into their molds—a depressing sight, but don't despair. You then flop the soufflés easily from their molds into baking dishes, coat them with a light white sauce, and sprinkle them with cheese. At this point, you can refrigerate them for hours before baking them a second time for serving. They puff up proudly again, rather more than the first time, as a matter of fact.

The other aspect of a twice-baked soufflé that I appreciate is that it's slightly more substantial than a regular soufflé. You get all the airy pleasure of the soufflé base, but you also get a savory, bubbling cheese sauce to go with it. I think this twice-baked spinach soufflé and a green salad make a perfect light supper or lunch.

Get ready to move fast once you've whipped the whites

Making a soufflé is like making a cake: it's important to be well organized because once you get started, you shouldn't stop to measure, butter, or search through the cupboard. It's essential to move smoothly and quickly once you start whipping your egg whites.

Wash, wilt, and sauté the spinach



Fold the spinach leaves in half and strip off their stems (unless you're using young tender spinach). Wash the leaves in several changes of water until totally free of grit; drain in a colander. Put the wet leaves in a large saucepan, cover, and wilt over medium heat, tossing the leaves once or twice, 5 to 7 minutes. Drain and let cool. Squeeze handfuls of spinach to extract as much water as possible.



Heat 1 table-spoon butter in a medium sauté pan and sauté the chopped onion until soft, 3 to 4 minutes. Chop the spinach finely. Add it to the onion, along with the garlic, nutmeg, salt, and pepper. Sauté, stirring often, until the spinach is quite dry, 3 to 4 minutes. Taste and adjust seasoning. Set aside.

Make the white sauce, stir in the spinach, and then add the yolks



Bring the milk just to a boil in a small pan. Melt 4 tablespoons butter in a medium pan; stir in the flour. Cook this roux over medium until it foams, 1 minute. Whisking briskly, pour in the hot milk; keep whisking as the sauce boils and thickens, 1 to 2 minutes. Reduce the heat; simmer 1 to 2 minutes. Add nutmeg, salt, and pepper. Pour a third of the sauce back into the small pan and pour the cream on top so a skin doesn't form; set aside.



Heat the oven to 400°F. Butter six 1-cup ramekins twice (see text below). Stir the spinach into the larger portion of the white sauce; warm it slightly. It should be soft enough to fall easily from a spoon without being soupy. Taste and adjust the seasonings; the mixture should be highly seasoned to balance the bland egg whites. Remove from the heat. Stir the yolks in one by one; the mixture should thicken slightly. If necessary, reheat 1 to 2 minutes, stirring, to thicken. Keep the pan warm.

You'll need two types of dish for a twice-baked soufflé: individual soufflé dishes, in the classic shape with straight sides (also called ramekins) for baking the soufflés initially, plus individual heatproof dishes for the second baking. Prettiest of all, I think, are the shallow gratin dishes shown here. They're just deep enough to contain the sauce but still display the puffy balloon of soufflé to advantage. You'll find that six fit quite easily on the average baking sheet. But any shallow heatproof bowls you happen to have will do. For more family-style meals, I bake all the soufflés together for serving in one standard baking dish, eliminating the need for the six small dishes.

Take the time to thoroughly butter the soufflé dishes so they don't stick. I like to double-coat them: melt a few tablespoons of butter, brush the dishes, and then freeze them for 5 to 10 minutes before brushing again to get a double layer of butter. This trick works for regular soufflés as well, and for any bread or cake that's liable to stick. Take particular care with the rim, where the mixture is most likely to catch.

Bake your soufflés in a water bath so that the heat penetrates evenly to the center and the steam

Whisk the whites until firm but not stiff



Start whisking the egg whites slowly, whether you're using a mixer or a whisk. Gradually increase to full speed, lifting the whisk high up from the bowl if beating by hand. Beat until the whites form soft peaks, 2 to 4 minutes. Finally, if working by hand, "tighten" the whites by whisking in large circles down in the bottom of the bowl for about 30 seconds.

The whites should be firm enough to hold a definite peak when the whisk is lifted, but the peaks shouldn't be stiff or choppy. The whites will look smooth and matte, and they'll cling to the bowl with no trace of granular "curdling."



keeps the mixture moist. A 400°F oven is good—hot enough to stimulate the egg whites into puffing up but not so hot that the soufflé dries out. Set a shelf low in the oven to make room for the water bath, remembering that the soufflés will rise quite high.

For a water bath, choose a roasting pan in which the six ramekins fit easily. You can line the pan with

Stir a quarter of the whipped whites into the warm spinach mixture



Check that the spinach mixture is very warm; if necessary, reheat it, stirring constantly. Add about a quarter of the whipped egg whites to the warm spinach and stir them together, scooping to the bottom of the pan to mix them thoroughly. The heat will cook the egg whites slightly and stiffen the mixture.



Tip this mixture into the remaining whites and, with a metal spoon or a rubber spatula, cut down into the center of the bowl, scoop under the contents, and turn them over in a rolling motion. At the same time, turn the bowl in the opposite direction. Keep folding gently just until the mixture is smooth. If it starts to lose volume and get sloppy, stop—a few bits of unmixed egg white are better than a flat soufflé.

Spoon the mixture into the ramekins



Gently spoon the soufflé mixture into the twice-buttered ramekins. Run a metal spatula or knife across the top so the mixture is smooth and level with the rim, letting excess fall back into the bowl. Run your thumb around each dish just inside the rim to make a groove so the soufflé will rise in a straight "hat." Set the dishes in a roasting pan; pour very hot water around them to come two-thirds of the way up the sides (don't let any splash into the dishes). Bring the water bath to a boil on the stove and then put the pan in the hot oven.

a folded dishtowel so that the ramekins will sit flat without sliding around, but this step isn't critical.

The remaining equipment isn't complicated, but you will need three pans: a sauté pan or a large saucepan for the spinach, and medium and small saucepans for the white sauce. Add to them a sauce whisk, a metal spatula or large knife, a rubber spatula, plus sundry wooden spoons, and you're ready to go.

The big question is how you'll whip the egg whites. The texture and volume of whipped whites is best when you beat them by hand with a balloon whisk in an unlined copper bowl. The whites interact with the copper to produce a dense texture with maximum volume and a more stable foam, and you can lift the balloon whisk easily in a high circular motion to incorporate more air.

Beating by hand is hard work, however, and copper bowls don't come cheap. Most professional cooks (and all restaurant chefs, who are perpetually on the run) use a high-powered electric mixer with a stainless-steel bowl and a whisk attachment for whipping egg whites. I don't recommend glass or ceramic bowls, as the whites detach from the smooth

Bake until the soufflés puff, remove from oven, and let cool completely

Bake the soufflés until they puff well above the rim of the dish and brown lightly on top, 20 to 25 minutes. Press them in the center with a fingertip—they should be just firm. Remove them from the oven, let them cool 4 to 5 minutes, and then lift out the ramekins to cool completely on the counter. As they cool, they'll shrink.



Prepare the soufflés for the sauce and the second baking



Lightly butter the baking dishes. When the soufflés are cool, run a knife around the edge of each dish, pull the mixture from the sides with your fingers and let the soufflé fall upside down into the buttered baking dishes.



Whisk the reserved white sauce with the cream, bring it to a boil, and taste it for seasoning (the sauce should be very light, barely thickened). Spoon this sauce over the soufflés, completely coating both them and the bottom of the dishes. Sprinkle the tops with the shredded Gruyère. Cover the soufflés with plastic wrap and store them in the refrigerator up to 24 hours.

When you're ready to serve, heat the oven to **425°F** and position the bottom shelf quite low. Uncover the soufflés and set them on a baking sheet. Bake the soufflés until they're puffed and browned and the sauce is bubbling, about 10 minutes (if your dishes are very cold, it may take longer). Serve them immediately.



sides and never form a close, tight texture. Plastic bowls are hard to clean of all traces of surface grease, which breaks down the whites.

Be sure that the whites are free of any trace of yolk or grease and that the bowl and whisk are clean and completely dry. If you do use a copper bowl, you must polish it just before use by rubbing it with salt and a cut lemon or a tablespoon or two of vinegar. You'll be astonished by the glowing pink tint that emerges, though it will cloud within an hour or two. Then wash the bowl with water and dry it thoroughly.

For the highest soufflé, aim for firm peaks

Like all soufflés, the twice-baked spinach miracle depends on whipped egg whites for lightness. Whisking to just the right consistency in the mixer or by hand is crucial.

You want to get as much volume as possible so that your final result will be light and airy, but you don't want to take the whites to the point of actually being stiff. The whipped whites—a network of proteins that have been stretched and aerated by whipping to trap thousands of air bubbles—need to have some elasticity left in them before baking. In the heat of the oven, the air bubbles will expand, and the whites must expand with them without collapsing, until the soufflé is eventually set firm by the heat.

The whipped whites are then folded into the basic mixture, an almost pourable sauce that must be highly flavored to offset the bland whites. The consistency of the basic mixture is important, too: it must be soft enough to fold easily into the fragile whites but stiff enough not to dilute them and knock out the air.

RECIPE

Twice-Baked Spinach Soufflés

Yields six 1-cup soufflés.

- 1 lb. fresh spinach
- 1 Tbs. unsalted butter
- 1 medium onion, finely chopped
- 1 clove garlic, finely chopped
- Pinch freshly grated nutmeg; more for the sauce
- 1 tsp. salt; more for the sauce
- ¼ tsp. freshly ground black pepper; more for the sauce
- 5 large egg yolks
- 7 large egg whites
- FOR THE WHITE SAUCE:**
 - 1½ cups milk
 - 4 Tbs. unsalted butter
 - ¼ cup all-purpose flour
 - 1½ cups light cream
- 1¼ oz. (½ cup) shredded Gruyère cheese

Follow the photos and captions starting on p. 59.

Anne Willan is the founder and director of La Varenne Cooking School. Her latest book is *Anne Willan's Cook It Right* (Reader's Digest, 1998). ♦

A traditional two-step process gives you moist, silken chicken and fish with less oil

The Secret to Tender, Juicy Stir-Fried Food

BY BARBARA TROPP

Stir-Fried Chicken in Lemon Sauce gets its luxurious texture from “velveting.”

Perhaps more than any other culinary culture, the Chinese are masters at manipulating texture. Many of their tricks require special equipment and fearsome firepower. But one near-magic technique—that of “velveting” chicken or fish to keep it amazingly tender in a stir-fry—is easily done at home.

Velveting is a simple two-part process: marinating chicken or fish in a mixture of

cornstarch, egg white, wine, and salt; and blanching the food either in barely simmering water or in warm oil. The marinade forms a protective coating around the chicken or fish to hold in juices; the blanching partially cooks the food, allowing you to add it toward the end of the stir-fry process. Spared the toughening high heat of the initial stir-fry and sealed in its protective coating, velveted

food remains fabulously juicy while never sticking to the pan.

High-quality ingredients guarantee great results

I am particular about the wine and salt I use in all of my cooking, including this marinade. Here, I like a Chinese rice wine that's golden, nutty, and good enough to drink. If you can't find a good

Marinated and blanched foods won't stick to the wok.

Chinese rice wine—Shao Hsing is my favorite type—then substitute the same amount of good dry sherry. Sample what you're using; if it tastes wretched, replace it. For salt, I like pure kosher. I find sea salt too assertive for Chinese flavors, and table salt, with its aluminum additives, tastes vile to me. If you must use sea or table salt, measure half as much as kosher, as their taste is twice as strong. (The smaller crystals of table salt and some sea salts also pack more tightly—another reason to use half as much.)

I also use fresh chicken and fish for velveting. If you use frozen, expect a less plush texture.

Mix the marinade until smooth. A smooth marinade coats the food evenly and eliminates any cornstarch clumps. I usually use a mini food processor, which smoothes and thickens the marinade dramatically. You can also mix the ingredients with your fingers until smooth and then beat it with a fork until slightly thick.

Give the food a long, cold soak. Food marinated for as little as an hour will reap the benefits of velveting, but I prefer a longer marinade of eight to

twenty-four hours. Given a longer time in its bath, the food plumps and seasons beautifully. But even if you're only marinating the food for a little while, keep it in the refrigerator. The cold encourages the egg white and cornstarch to adhere to the food, creating a coating that won't fall off during cooking.

The key to the blanch— when in doubt, scoop it out

Once the food has marinated, the blanching is a quick process. If you're using water, bring it to a near simmer; oil should be heated to 275°F. I almost always velvet with water. The result is lighter, the process is cleaner, and I can use the same water to blanch my stir-fry vegetables (before velveting the chicken or fish). In fact, by velveting in water and using a nonstick wok, I regularly cut the oil needed to stir-fry by two-thirds. Still, if you are an inquisitive cook, do try vel-

veting in oil. (I've given the method for both in the recipe.) You may find its more luxurious texture worth the trouble.

Get everything ready for your stir-fry before blanching. Once blanched, the velveting food should be used in a stir-fry right away or it will lose its special plushness. This means you'll want to have everything you need for your stir-fry ready to go. You'll also need a large plate handy so you can spread the velveting food in a single layer. If the ingredients are piled up, they steam and their texture changes.

Once you've slid your marinated food into the simmering water, keep a close watch. A perfectly velveting piece of fish or chicken will be just barely cooked on the outside. Take the food out of the water—a large Chinese mesh spoon is the perfect tool here—as soon as the pieces turn white. That can be as quick as five to ten seconds for shreds of meat, or half a minute for bigger pieces. If you think you should scoop, do. Remember, you're only cooking the outside of the meat. The inside will still be raw; it will get cooked to total doneness in the stir-fry.

The essence of “velveting”: a cold soak followed by a hot bath



A mixture of egg white, cornstarch, wine, and salt seasons and coats the food. You can make the marinade in a food processor or by hand, smoothing any lumps between your fingers.



A long, cold soak plumps the food and keeps the coating intact.

Almost as soon as the food goes in, it's time to take it out. Use chopsticks to keep the chicken or fish from sticking together and a large Chinese mesh spoon to retrieve it.





The "velveting" food finishes cooking in the wok. Its cornstarch coating and partial cooking keep it from sticking to the pan.

RECIPES

Master Recipe for Velveting

This recipe prepares chicken or fish to be tender and juicy when stir-fried. It is not a finished dish but a great start for the stir-fry recipe that follows, or for your own favorite.

- 1 large or extra-large egg white**
- 1 tsp. kosher salt**
- 1 Tbs. good-quality Chinese rice wine or dry sherry**
- 1 Tbs. cornstarch**
- 1 lb. fresh skinless, boneless chicken breast, cut in cubes, nuggets, or shreds; or 1 lb. shrimp or scallops (or a combination), shrimp butterflied, scallops halved if large**
- 4 cups water (for velveting in water) or 3 to 4 cups corn, peanut, or canola oil (for velveting in oil)**

In a mini food processor, blend the egg white, salt, wine, and cornstarch until thick and smooth, about 2 min. Or mix the ingredients by hand, smoothing lumps with your fingers and beating with a fork to thicken slightly.

With your hands, toss the chicken or fish with the marinade to evenly coat and separate the pieces. Cover with plastic and refrigerate for 30 min. or overnight.

Shortly before stir-frying, bring the water to a steaming, near simmer, or bring the oil to the slow-fry stage, 275°F on a deep-fry thermometer. Next to the stove,

set a plate big enough to hold the fish or chicken in a single layer. Have a large Chinese mesh spoon nearby or a colander waiting in the sink. (If blanching in oil, only use the mesh spoon.)

Toss the chicken or fish once more and slide it into the hot water or oil, leaving any excess marinade behind. Stir gently with chopsticks to separate the pieces. Watch carefully to see when the outside turns 95% white, 5 to 10 seconds for shreds or tiny cubes, 30 to 45 seconds for larger nuggets. Scoop out the food promptly with the mesh spoon or empty it into the colander and quickly spread it on the plate.

Velveting Stir-Fry with Lemon Sauce

Serve the stir-fry with rice or with Chinese egg noodles or fettuccine. If using noodles, cook a half pound until *al dente* before you begin to stir-fry. Toss the hot noodles with a little salt and a tablespoon of oil to keep them from sticking; stir them into the stir-fry just before adding the sauce. *Serves four.*

- 1 lb. chicken or fish as described in the Master Recipe for Velveting (left)**

FOR THE AROMATIC MIXTURE:

- 2 tsp. finely chopped garlic**
- 2 tsp. finely chopped fresh ginger**
- 3 Tbs. scallion (green and white parts), cut into thin rings**
- ¼ to ½ tsp. dried red chile flakes**

FOR THE LEMON SAUCE:

- ¼ cup fresh lemon juice**
- Finely grated zest of 1 scrubbed lemon**
- 2 Tbs. soy sauce**
- 1 Tbs. sugar**
- ½ tsp. kosher salt**
- ½ cup unsalted homemade or low-salt canned chicken stock**
- 3 Tbs. corn, peanut, or canola oil**
- 1 small yellow onion, cut in half and then in thin wedges**
- 1 small leek (white and light green parts), halved lengthwise, cut crosswise into ⅛-inch slices, and rinsed well**
- 6 oz. asparagus, trimmed and cut on an exaggerated diagonal in 1-inch lengths**
- 1 small red bell pepper, cut in ¼-inch strips**
- 6 oz. baby bok choy or Napa cabbage, sliced into wide ribbons (leave the small, tender bok choy leaves whole)**
- 1½ tsp. cornstarch dissolved in 2 Tbs. cold chicken stock or water**
- Cooked rice or Chinese egg noodles**

Marinate and chill the chicken or fish as described in the Master Recipe at left. Assemble your velveting station as described in the Master Recipe.

For the aromatics—In a small dish, combine the garlic, ginger, scallion, and chile flakes.

For the sauce—In a small bowl, combine the lemon juice, zest, soy sauce, sugar, salt, and stock.

Velvet the chicken or fish following the directions in the Master Recipe.

Heat a large wok or skillet over high heat until very hot. Add 2 Tbs. oil; swirl to glaze the pan. Reduce the heat to medium high. Add the aromatics and stir gently until fully fragrant, 20 to 30 seconds, adjusting the heat so they foam without browning. Add the onion and leek and toss until translucent, 2 to 3 min., adjusting the heat so they sizzle without scorching and adding a bit more oil if needed to prevent sticking. Add the asparagus and bell pepper; sear and toss until just half-cooked, about 2 min. Add the cabbage and toss just until it wilts. (If serving with noodles, add them now.)

Stir the lemon sauce and add it to the pan. Toss to combine, raising the heat to bring the sauce to a simmer. Fold in the chicken or fish. Stir the cornstarch mixture to recombine and pour it into the pan. Continue stirring until the sauce turns glossy, about 15 seconds, and then turn off the heat. Serve immediately on a bed of rice (unless you've added noodles).

Barbara Tropp is the author of The Modern Art of Chinese Cooking (William Morrow, 1982) and China Moon Cookbook (Workman, 1992). ♦





Late-Summer Fresh Fig Desserts

Try them tucked inside a tart, in ice cream, as a filling for bar cookies, or plain and simple

BY DEBORAH MADISON

I grew up in northern California eating figs right off the tree, so summer just doesn't feel like summer to me without enjoying a tree-ripened fig with its warm, syrupy juices beading on the surface. Now that I live in northern New Mexico—far from fig trees—any family members who come to visit from California know that if it's summer, they'd better remember to bring some figs from the back yard.

Fig trees are prolific bearers, so when guests bring them, it's usually by the suitcase, the delicate fruits nestled in egg cartons to protect them during the trip. I love eating fresh figs plain, but to tease the most out of them and to extend my enjoyment, I make them into all kinds of delicious desserts: tarts, bar cookies, roasted in caramel, and even ice cream.



Fig Tart with Orange Custard has only a scanty layer of orange-scented filling, so the figs get full play.

"I'm a fig lover far from home," says Deborah Madison, who lives in Santa Fe, and whose California childhood included eating figs right from the tree. When she finds figs at the market, she grabs them.



Figs grow best in warm climates

Figs grow abundantly in California, as well as in places where the summers are hot and the winters are mild, such as Georgia, Alabama, and Texas.

Figs enjoy two seasons. In most parts of the country, you'll start seeing them in the market in June, and then in mid-August and September. I especially love those that come later during the really hot weather, when the sugar is up and the flavor is more deeply concentrated.

Ripe figs are fragile and sweet-smelling

When you find ripe figs, hurry them home and use them fast, or else stash them in the refrigerator. Most will hold for a few days, but ripe figs can spoil, even in the fridge (they can get expensive, and you'll want to savor every one).

Silky and oozing with sweetness, fresh figs announce that summer is in full tilt.

A fig is ripe when it's soft and the thin skin rests close to the flesh, which is moist, fragrant, and sweet. Sometimes you'll see the skin splitting open to reveal the flesh. An unripe fig, on the other hand, is firm with a cottony white layer between the skin and the somewhat dry, undeveloped center.

Coax slightly underripe figs to ripeness by leaving them on the kitchen counter for a day or two. Store them in a single layer rather than piled on top of one another; they're less likely to spoil that way.

Avoid figs that are resting on flattened sides or that are slumped in their containers.

They've probably begun to turn from too much heat during travel. (You can tell sour figs by their off smell.)

The tricky part about figs is that they need to be picked ripe because they won't get much better after



Making caramel takes patience. Melt the sugar slowly, gently shaking and tilting the pan.



When every bit of sugar has melted and the syrup is deep amber, pour it over the figs.

they're picked. But with only a thin skin protecting the tender flesh, ripe figs are fragile and don't travel well. That's why the figs you find in stores are often not at their height of perfection.

Many varieties, all sweet

Though there are many varieties of fig, and each has its own personality, I use them more or less interchangeably in cooking, as long as they have plenty of flavor and sweetness. Here are some of the varieties you're most likely to find.

♦ **Mission figs** have dark purple skin and reddish-brown flesh. Missions are my favorites for cooking; I love their special intensity. These are the figs California is famous for.

♦ **Brown Turkeys**, a large southern fig, have brownish skin and pink flesh. They're also grown in California.

♦ **Royal Mediterraneans** are green-skinned with a purple tinge. The flesh is a whitish pink.

♦ **Calimyrnas** (the California version of a variety called Smyrna) have green skins and ivory-colored flesh; they're used for drying and eating out of hand.

♦ **Kadota, White King, Everbearing, and Strawberry figs** are other varieties that you may find at the market to cook and to eat out of hand.

Figs don't need peeling

A fig's skin is edible; I never peel it, except for rough patches or when the skin is still on the thick side. It's always a good idea, though, to rinse off any dust. Leaving the skins on for the Fig & Anise Ice Cream on p. 70 gives more intense flavor. *(Continued)*



Roasted Figs with Caramel is a simple combination of fresh figs roasted in caramel. Try a garnish of whipped cream and fresh raspberries.

Savor figs simply

A truly ripe fig is a marvelous dessert on its own. When I serve figs plain, I warm them briefly in the sun to bring out their aroma.

◆ Milder cheeses like ricotta, mascarpone, and farmer's cheese go well with figs. Make a deep cross cut in the fig, spoon some soft cheese into the center, drizzle with warm honey and serve with walnuts.



◆ Pungent, salty cheeses (feta, goat cheese, Manchego, and Dry Jack) are a delicious contrast to a fig's sweetness. Garnish with ground pepper, arugula, or mint leaves.

◆ Fresh figs are especially compatible with raspberries, pears, and white peaches. Make a deep cross cut in the fig, arrange sliced fruit around it, and tumble raspberries into the figs, letting them spill out onto the plate.

Figs go well with a range of herbs and spices

A surprisingly broad range of flavors make suitable partners for figs.

Lemon enhances the fruit's sweetness. I always add it to fig preserves and to the filling for the fig bars at right, regardless of the other flavorings I use, because I love the way lemon sets off the flavor of ripe figs or brings out the sweetness of figs that are a touch underripe. A dash of balsamic vinegar works, too.

Herbs balance a fig's intense sweetness. Bay and thyme, anise hyssop or aniseed, and lavender are all delicious with figs, both in sweet and savory dishes. Cloves are especially good in fig tarts or preserves. Try cardamom and rose water for a delicious variation in the fig bar filling. Orange flower water is good in the fig bars too, and, as you'll taste, it's wonderful in the fig tart, below.

RECIPES

Fresh Fig Tart with Orange Flower Custard

Arrange the figs in concentric circles or jumble them on helter-skelter. If you can't find orange flower water, substitute 1 teaspoon orange zest. *Yields one 9-inch tart; serves six to eight.*

FOR THE CRUST:

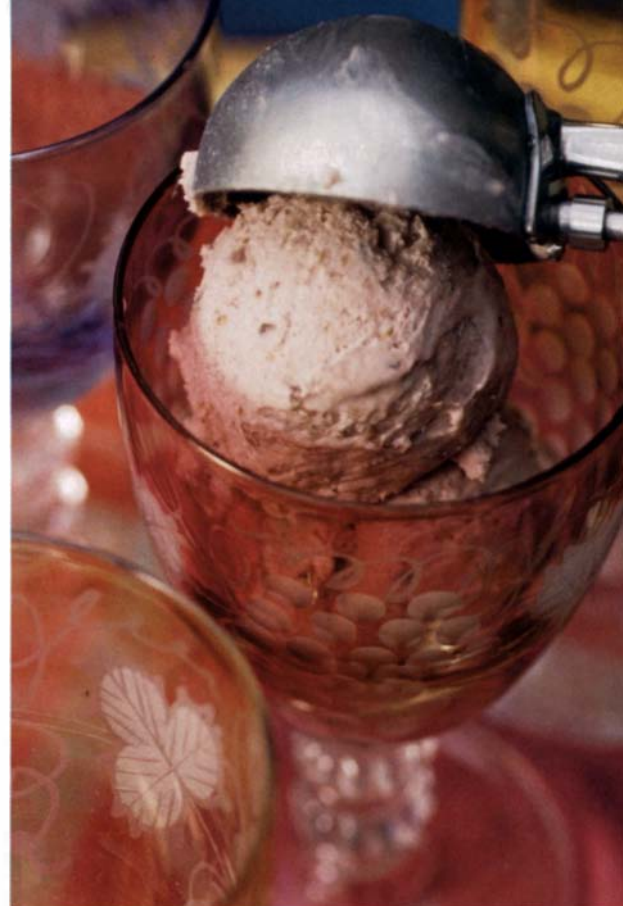
5½ oz. (1¼ cups) all-purpose flour
¼ tsp. salt
1 tsp. sugar
4 oz. (8 Tbs.) chilled butter
2 to 3 Tbs. ice water mixed with ½ tsp. vanilla extract

FOR THE FILLING:

12 to 16 ripe figs (using a variety is pretty)
1 large egg yolk
½ cup crème fraîche or sour cream
1½ Tbs. packed light brown sugar
2 tsp. orange flower water

To make the crust—Combine the flour, salt, and sugar in a bowl and then cut in the butter until the mixture forms very fine crumbs. You can also do this by pulsing in a food processor. Sprinkle in enough of the ice water for the dough to come together, and then shape it into a disk. Wrap the dough in plastic and chill for about 15 min. Roll the dough into an 11-inch circle and put it in a 9-inch tart pan with a removable bottom. Pinch the dough edge so that it's slightly thick, even, and rises just above the rim. Prick the bottom with a fork in 6 or 7 places, and then put the pan in the freezer for 20 min. while you heat the oven to 425°F. Put the chilled tart shell on a baking sheet, line the shell with foil, and fill with beans or pie weights. Bake until it's lightly colored, 20 to 25 min. Remove the tart and reduce the oven temperature to 400°F; remove the weights and foil.

To make the filling—Cut the stems off the figs (leave the skins on) and slice the figs in half—if they're large, you may choose to quarter them. Set



"Fig & Anise Ice Cream sounds exotic, but I've found recipes for it in old southern community cookbooks," says Deborah Madison.

aside one-quarter of the figs (to be added after you pour in the custard). Arrange the remaining figs, cut side up, on the tart shell; this will leave room for the custard to spread evenly when you pour it.

Whisk the egg yolk, *crème fraîche*, brown sugar, and orange flower water until combined and then pour carefully around but not over the figs. Add the remaining figs. Bake the tart on the baking sheet in the 400°F oven until the custard is lightly colored and set, about 30 min. Serve slightly warm.

Fig & Anise Ice Cream

Leaving on the fig skins makes for an even more intense flavor. You'll need an ice-cream machine. *Yields 6 cups.*

1½ lb. ripe figs, stems removed, unpeeled
⅓ cup plus 2 Tbs. sugar
2 cups cream or half-and-half
⅓ cup honey
1 tsp. aniseed
3 large eggs, separated
1 cup crème fraîche

Purée the figs in a food processor or blender. Transfer the purée to a 10-inch skillet with ⅓ cup of the sugar. Cook over medium heat, stirring often to prevent sticking, until the figs have thickened into a jam, about 30 min. In a saucepan, heat the cream, honey, and aniseed over medium heat. Bring to a boil, stirring to dissolve the honey. Whisk a little of the hot cream into the egg yolks, and then whisk them back

into the pan. Cook over low heat, stirring constantly, until the mixture thickens and coats the spoon. Immediately transfer to a bowl. Stir in the fig purée and *crème fraîche* and chill thoroughly. Whisk the egg whites until foamy; add the remaining 2 Tbs. sugar and continue beating until soft peaks form. Fold the egg whites into the cooled fig purée, and then freeze in an ice-cream maker following the manufacturer's instructions.

Roasted Figs with Caramel

You can make this dish ahead of time, and it's a good recipe for slightly under-ripe figs. I like to serve it with fresh raspberries. *Serves four.*

12 ripe but slightly firm figs, preferably black Missions or brown Turkeys
½ cup sugar
Whipped cream or ricotta cheese for garnish

Heat the oven to 450°F. Select a nonreactive baking dish in which all the figs will fit snugly so they'll stay standing upright during roasting. Rinse and dry the figs and arrange them snugly in the baking dish. In a medium skillet, spread the sugar evenly; put the skillet on medium-low heat. When the sugar starts melting around the edges, shake the pan to redistribute the unmelted sugar. When the sugar turns a deep honey color, start shaking, tilting, and swirling the pan to melt the sugar evenly. Be patient, there's no need to poke at the unmelted sugar. Continue this way until all the sugar is completely melted, clear, and turns medium amber, about 15 min. total cooking time. Pour the caramel over the figs, scraping out the pan thoroughly. Roast the figs in the caramel until big brown bubbles form and the caramel is deep amber, about 15 min. Cool the figs in the fridge; they'll collapse as they cool. Arrange the figs on serving plates, drizzle the caramel over them, and garnish with whipped cream or ricotta.

Fig Bars with Thyme

This fig jam keeps for weeks, so if you like, make it well ahead of time. Try to use lemon thyme, if possible. These bars are good with a dollop of whipped cream. *Yields twenty-five 1½-inch squares.*

FOR THE PASTRY:

2 oz. (½ cup) walnuts
¼ cup plus 2 Tbs. sugar
6¾ oz. (1½ cups) all-purpose flour
½ cup packed light brown sugar
½ tsp. salt
½ tsp. baking powder
4 oz. (8 Tbs.) butter, chilled and cut into small pieces
1 large egg yolk
1 tsp. vanilla extract

FOR THE JAM:

2 lb. very ripe figs, stems removed, unpeeled
¼ cup sugar



Fig bars are filled with sweet jam that's scented with thyme.

Experiment with other seasonings, such as cardamom and rose water or bay and lavender. And cook up a double batch of the jam—it's great on toast and scones, too.

7 to 8 large sprigs fresh thyme
Grated zest of 1 lemon
1 to 2 Tbs. lemon juice; more or less to taste

To make the pastry—Heat the oven to 350°F. In a food processor, grind the walnuts with 2 Tbs. of the sugar until fine; remove and set aside. Put the flour, the remaining ¼ cup white sugar, the brown sugar, salt, and baking powder in the food processor; process until blended. Add the butter; process until the mixture looks crumbly. Add the egg yolk and vanilla and pulse until mixture is wet and clumping, about 40 seconds (it won't form a ball). Pack two-thirds of the dough into an ungreased 8x8-inch baking dish; set aside the other third. Bake until the dough is lightly browned and keeps a slight indentation when you press it lightly, about 30 min.

To make the jam—While the crust is baking, coarsely chop the figs. Put them in a nonreactive skillet with the sugar and thyme and cook over medium-high heat, stirring occasionally, until the juices have reduced and the fruit is tender and thick, about 20 min. Discard the thyme sprigs. Stir in the lemon zest, add the lemon juice to taste, and set aside. If not using right away, refrigerate in a closed container.

To assemble the fig bars—In a mixing bowl, crumble together the remaining dough with the reserved walnut and sugar mixture. Gently spread the fig jam on top of the baked crust and sprinkle the dough mixture over the filling. The top will look crumbly. Bake until browned on top, about 40 min. Cool completely before you cut into bars 1½ inches square.

Deborah Madison is a cookbook author who lives in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Her most recent book is the award-winning Vegetarian Cooking for Everyone (Broadway Books, 1997). ♦

Working with fresh spinach

Spinach is a most adaptable green. Cream it, sauté it with garlic, stuff it in ravioli or chicken breasts, or serve it raw in salads—we all have our favorites. So here are some tips on choosing, cleaning, and cooking spinach.

A younger plant yields tender, sweet leaves

Some varieties of spinach have flat, smooth leaves, others have thick, crinkly leaves, but they're all best when young and tender.

Check the stem to gauge tenderness and age. A thin, flexible stem indicates a tender, young plant. Choose these spinach leaves for salads or recipes where the spinach is served raw. Thick, fibrous stems mean more mature, tougher plants, which are best suited for cooking.

Shop for crisp, bright green leaves with no dark, bruised patches or yellowing. I like to buy loose leaves or bunches so



To remove the stem from a spinach leaf, fold the leaf in half along the spine, grasp the bottom of the stem and tear toward the tip of the leaf.

I can judge their quality. Store fresh spinach in a dry plastic bag in the refrigerator crisper, where it will keep for two to three days.

Spinach stems, even of some young leaves, are fibrous, stringy, and difficult to eat, especially after cooking. Remove the stems before washing (see photo above); discard them or save them to add to a vegetable stock. I don't bother removing the stems from truly tender, small leaves with equally tender, thin stems.

Notoriously sandy, spinach must be washed carefully. After following the directions in the center photo



To clean spinach, swish in a basin of cold water, let sit for a minute, and then lift into a colander to drain. Dump the water and repeat.

above, taste a leaf. If you detect even the slightest bit of grit, wash the leaves again.

Steam for simplicity, blanch for delicacy

Raw tender spinach can be added directly to soups, stews, and sauces. Just roll the leaves, cut them into strips (see "Cutting a chiffonade," Basics, *Fine Cooking* #21), and add them as you would add any leafy green herb. But most of the time, you'll be cooking the spinach. You'll quickly notice that when you cook spinach it collapses, or wilts, to a fraction



After steaming or boiling spinach, wring out excess water. Grab a fistful at a time and squeeze.

of its original volume. That's because spinach leaves, like lettuce and other greens, are mostly water. One pound of unwashed fresh spinach will yield $\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ cup of cooked spinach, or about two servings.

When a recipe calls for cooked spinach, the simplest technique is to steam it immediately after washing. The water droplets clinging to the leaves and the natural moisture in the spinach provide all the liquid you need.

When I have really mature spinach, or when I'm using spinach in a delicately flavored soup or sauce, I often blanch the leaves in boiling, salted water. Although this is a bit more trouble, it removes any trace of bitterness, and it gives a somewhat brighter green to the finished dish.

Drain the cooked spinach in a colander but don't refresh it in cold water. Squeeze out excess liquid. You can also put the spinach in a dishtowel and twist to wring out extra moisture. The spinach can then be chopped and used in a recipe.

Molly Stevens is a contributing editor to *Fine Cooking*. ♦

Citrus zester vs. channel knife

For pure zest, use a zester; for decoration, pick a channel knife

Reach for a zester whenever you need strips of citrus zest—it's a well-designed little tool. Its five eyeholes are shallow so you end up with tiny slivers of the highly aromatic zest and none of the bitter white pith. The action of a zester also releases the volatile oils in the citrus skin, which give your dish even more, well, zest.



A zester shaves thin, shallow slivers.

A channel knife is also a practical tool, particularly for decorative touches. Its single hole removes thick, deep strips of peel, pith and all. Twist these strips into curlicues and use them as garnishes. Or run the knife down a cucumber or lemon a few times to create pretty patterns.



A channel knife cuts thick, deep strips.

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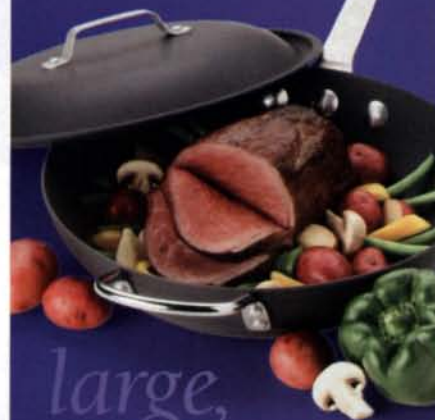
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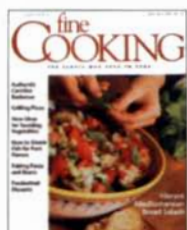
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Imagine you're in a pine forest after a sudden down-pour. Inhale deeply. Now magnify that fragrance and you'll come close to the aroma of fresh rosemary. You'll also understand why a light hand with rosemary is usually best.

Rosemary's unique flavor and fragrance can be wonderful, but too much of its piny perfume can overwhelm a dish. It's best paired with full-flavored foods, such as lamb, beef, pork, and grilled or roasted chicken. Fattier fish varieties, like mackerel and salmon, can stand up to it, as can some vegetables, particularly hearty roots and tubers like parsnips and sweet potatoes.

Tender sprigs for subtle flavor

Rosemary, which is a member of the mint family, is a wonderful herb to grow at home. A little goes a long way, so you can snip off a sprig as needed but keep the plant intact.

In the market, you'll often find giant branches of rosemary, which make great skewers. But you'll be better off cooking with smaller, more tender sprigs; large, woody branches are often more resinous. And, although rosemary will last a week or so wrapped in plastic in the fridge, it's unlikely you'd use up such a big bunch.

Use whole sprigs to infuse flavor. Rosemary's tough, needle-like leaves aren't necessarily pleasant to eat, so I rarely use just the leaves in a dish. Instead, I add whole sprigs, which are easy to retrieve and discard before serving.

When I want to add rosemary's flavor to long-cooking dishes (e.g., braises), I steep a few sprigs in the braising liquid. For quick-cooking dishes, like boneless chicken breasts or veal cutlets, I flavor the butter or oil I'm sautéing the meat in by heating the fat with a few sprigs of rosemary and then removing the herb after a few minutes. This method releases

the herb's piny freshness but none of the bitter tang.

You can adjust the degree of rosemary flavor by fiddling with the time the herb steeps in the braising liquid or is in contact with the oil—the longer the time, the stronger the flavor.

In salad dressings where the herb remains unheated, I bruise the sprigs to release the aromatic oils. I then cover the bruised sprigs with vinegar, let it stand for about 15 minutes, remove the herb, and proceed with making my vinaigrette.

I almost always prefer fresh rosemary to dried, but dried rosemary, which packs less punch, will work in a pinch.

Choose smaller sprigs of rosemary for a more delicate flavor.

The Key to Using Rosemary—Be Stingy

Rosemary works best in tandem

Given its strong personality, I rarely use rosemary as the only flavoring in a dish. Some of its best flavor companions are onion, garlic, lemon, and olive oil. In fact, those last three ingredients combined with rosemary make an easy and delicious marinade. When using rosemary in a spice rub, I'll pulverize it and mellow the herb by combining it with spices that can hold their own, like ground cardamom, cloves, allspice, and nutmeg.

Try rosemary in sweets

Used judiciously, rosemary provides an intriguing herbal backdrop to sweet dishes. A fiercely tart lemon sorbet, for example, gains in complexity when a sprig of rosemary has been immersed in the sugar-syrup base before being combined with lemon juice. A honey-sweetened infusion of the herb refreshes black tea, whether served hot or iced.

Finely chopped rosemary is also a wonderful addition to rustic bread dough, cracker-like flatbreads, or breadsticks.

Experiment with rosemary

- ◆ Toss hearty vegetables with olive oil and a sprinkling of finely chopped rosemary mixed with thyme, oregano, or sage, and then roast.
- ◆ Heat some rosemary in olive oil and drizzle the hot infused oil over a salad of sliced grilled steak and arugula.
- ◆ Stuff a chicken with a couple of lemons, garlic cloves, and sprigs of rosemary before roasting.
- ◆ Thread chunks of peeled pears or apples onto long sprigs of the herb and roast as a side dish for meat and game.
- ◆ Steep a rosemary sprig in lemonade for a subtle, sophisticated flavor.
- ◆ Poach pears with a little rosemary and honey.
- ◆ Sprinkle kirsch and very finely chopped rosemary over a grapefruit half and broil briefly.

Robert Wemischner's books include *Gourmet to Go* (Wiley, 1997, with Karen Karp), a guide to opening and operating a specialty food store. ♦

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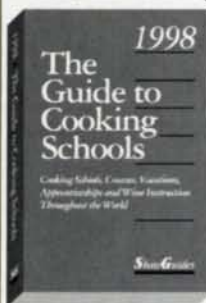
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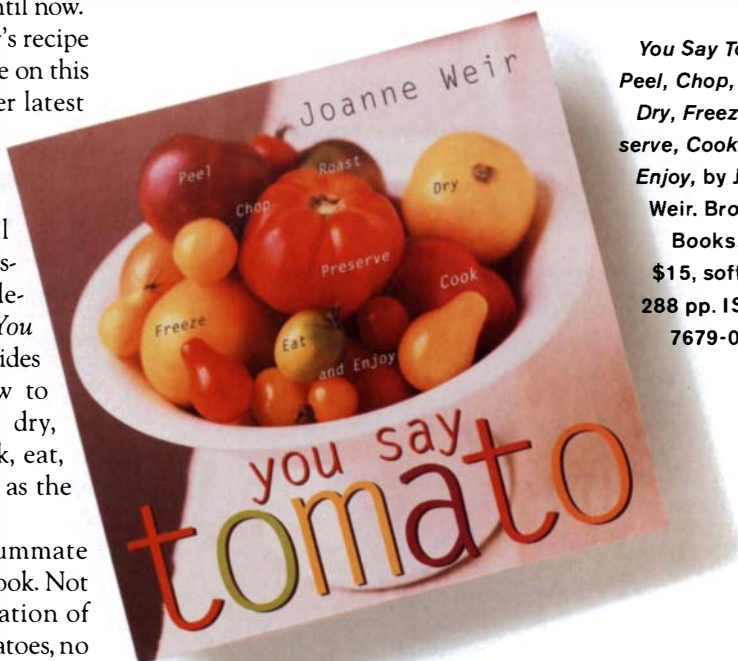
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The Ultimate Tomato Lover's Cookbook

It has always bothered me to throw out tomato peels. Say you're making a big batch of sauce, or tomato bisque, or jambalaya. There you are with a perfect mound of peelings, which must be good for something. But no, into the compost heap they go. Until now.

Until Joanne Weir's recipe for tomato dust (more on this later), featured in her latest cookbook, *You Say Tomato*. Weir wrote *From Tapas to Meze*, as well as several books in the Williams-Sonoma Seasonal Celebrations series. In *You Say Tomato*, she provides information on how to peel, chop, roast, dry, freeze, preserve, cook, eat, and enjoy tomatoes, as the subtitle proclaims.

This is the consummate tomato lover's cookbook. Not a haphazard compilation of recipes featuring tomatoes, no bizarre suggestions or indigestible dishes here. Instead, *You Say Tomato* illustrates how incredibly diverse and satisfying tomatoes are, as witnessed by the wide variety of cuisines that use them so skillfully and deliciously. But it's not just Weir's recipes that make this cookbook invaluable. It's her thorough understanding of



You Say Tomato:
Peel, Chop, Roast,
Dry, Freeze, Pre-
serve, Cook, Eat &
Enjoy, by Joanne
Weir. Broadway
Books, 1998.
\$15, softcover;
288 pp. ISBN 0-
7679-0135-5.

tomatoes, from basics and techniques (including growing, cooking, and preserving tips) to sources, varieties, and even history, that makes this a solid kitchen companion, regardless of the season.

For example, Weir opens *You Say Tomato* with a helpful glossary, explaining the difference between tomato purée

and tomato paste, what exactly is tomato concassé, and what distinguishes tomatillos from green tomatoes.

From there she continues on with tomato techniques, including a variety of ways in which tomatoes may be preserved; canning, sun-drying, freezing, making your own tomato paste...and that lovely

tomato dust. I'll never have to throw out my peelings again. I just bake them until completely dry (up to two hours), pulverize them with a spice grinder into a fine powder or dust, and store the dust to use as a flavor enhancer for fresh pasta dough, vinaigrettes, sauces, and soups.

Since we all know the unrivaled flavor of a garden-picked tomato, Weir provides us with a quick review of tomato-growing tips and techniques. She adds a helpful list of popular tomato varieties, together with the vital statistics of each (growing season, size, heirloom or not, etc.). This is followed by a really helpful listing of sources for tomato seeds. If you're in the market for heirlooms or gourmet varieties, you'll want to dive straight into this section.

But if you have your tomatoes and you're ready to cook, then you're ready for Weir's world tomato tour. From Morocco's fish tagine, vibrant with preserved lemon and cilantro, seasoned with garlic, peppers, and tomatoes, to the southwestern United States' tostada salad with smooth black beans, crisp corn tortillas, and roasted tomatillo and avocado salsa, Weir's recipes span the globe. While the

What's your
favorite
summertime
cookbook?

"If I could have only one cookbook by my side all summer, it would be *Italian Regional Cooking*, by Ada Boni."

—Clifford W. Wright, author of *Grill Italian*

"Two books I practically keep with me in the garden all summer are Bert Greene's *Greene on Greens*, and Evan Kleiman and Viana La Place's *Cucina Fresca*."

—Renee Shepherd, author of *Recipes from a Kitchen Garden*

"Oh, there are so many, but I guess my favorite would be Alice Waters' *Chez Panisse Vegetables*."

—Molly Stevens, author of "Roasts on the Grill," *Fine Cooking* #27

majority of recipes are inspired by the Mediterranean regions—from Cyprus and Greece, Provence, Spain, and Italy—you'll also discover dishes flavored with ginger, lemongrass, and basil from Vietnam and Thailand, and plenty of recipes that feature the earthy flavors of North, South, and Central America.

The recipes in *You Say Tomato* use every kind of tomato: dried, canned, green, and mouthwatering juicy fresh. There's a wonderful collection of sauces (Peak-Season Tomato Sauce, Sicilian Tomato Pesto, Ragù, Smoky Yellow Tomato Sauce, to name a few), as well as soups and salads like Tomato Corn Chowder and Panza-

nella. There are sections devoted to pastas and grains, first courses, pizzas and flatbreads, seafoods, side dishes, and sandwiches.

The only caveat I have regarding this book is that the recipes occasionally require a judgment call on the part of the cook (a shorter or longer

cooking time, a higher or lower oven temperature) and that many recipes require you to make something well in advance (preserved lemons, calzone dough, or oven-dried tomatoes). I'd recommend this book for cooks who know their way around a kitchen.

So give yourself *You Say Tomato* and use it all year, enjoying summer's bounty with sandwiches of roasted tomatoes and herbed goat cheese, and warming winter's chill with southern-style beans and rice. For the tomato-lovin' cook, nothing could be better.

Kay Fahey wrote "Green Tomatoes, In & Out of the Frying Pan," for *Fine Cooking* #21. She lives in Reno, Nevada. ♦

Summer Nectarine, Tomato & Red Onion Salsa

(From Joanne Weir's *You Say Tomato*.) Yields about 2 cups.

1 large red, ripe tomato, diced
2 small ripe nectarines, halved, seeded, and diced
½ small red onion, diced
1½ Tbs. thinly sliced fresh basil
1½ Tbs. thinly sliced fresh mint
1½ Tbs. coarsely chopped fresh cilantro
½ jalapeño or serrano pepper, seeded and minced
1 Tbs. fresh orange juice
1 Tbs. fresh lime juice
Coarse salt and freshly ground black pepper

In a medium bowl, toss together the tomato, nectarines, red onion, basil, mint, cilantro, jalapeño, orange juice, and lime juice. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Use within 2 hours.

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335 varieties of tomato seed packets. **Totally Tomatoes** (803/663-0016) sells over 100 varieties. **Renee's Garden** (888/880-7228) sells seeds for sauce tomatoes, slicers, and a tricolor cherry tomato mix.

Enjoying Wine

Home stores are often sell roomy wine racks, but here are a few mail-order sources that specialize in wine storage items: **IWA** (800/527-4072); **The Wine Enthusiast** (800/356-8466); **The Wine Rack Company** (888/687-2517) or **The Wine Rack Shop** (888/526-7225).

Brochettes & BBQ Ribs

For lump hardwood charcoal and hardwood chunks, call **People's Woods** in Rhode Island, (800/729-5800 or 401/725-2700) or **Lazzari Fuel Company** in San Francisco (800/242-7265).

Mixing Tools

Le Creuset and Rubbermaid heat-proof spatulas, as well as many of the other mixing tools pictured, are available in cooking supply stores or by calling **A Cook's Wares** at 800/915-9788.

For information about the tools pictured and others, call: **Black & Decker** (888/548-8665); **Braun** (800/272-8611); **Cuisinart** (800/726-0190); **KitchenAid** (800/541-6390 or); **Krups** (800/526-5377); or **Magic Mill** (914/368-2532).

A Cooking Vacation

For more information about renting a *gîte* in France, contact: **Federation Nationale des Gîtes de France**. The neatest way is to go to its web site at www.gites-de-france.fr (it's in English and French). You can also write to 59, rue St.-Lazare, 75009 Paris, France, or fax to 011-33-1-42-81-28-53. You start by ordering a catalog on a specific *département*, or small region, (so get yourself a good map; the web site has one). The catalogs give descriptions, pictures, and prices for each property. Once you make a selection, contact the Gîtes de France office in the region. The catalogs cost about \$8 each.

Before you go, find out which towns have markets and the days they're open. A few books offer

that information: *Food Lovers' Guide to France*, by Patricia Wells (Workman, 1987); *Take 5,000 Eggs—Food from the Markets & Fairs of Southern France*, by Paul & Jeanne Strang (Kyle Cathie Limited, 1997, distributed in the US by Trafalgar Square); *Markets of Provence*, by Dixon & Ruthanne Long (Collins, 1996).

Fresh Fig Desserts

Melissa's (800/588-0151) will ship fresh figs. Look for orange flower water at Middle Eastern grocers or order from **Adriana's Caravan** (800/316-0820).

Artisan Foods

When in New York City, visit the **Poseidon Bakery** (212/757-6173) at 629 Ninth Ave., between West 44th and 45th Streets.

Photo: Scott Phillips



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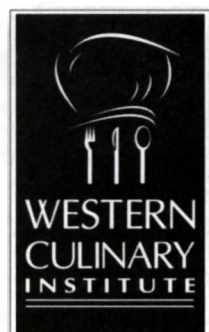
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Choosing Fruit That's Truly Ripe

What a sensation to bite into a really ripe peach—the soft flesh, the heady aromas, the sweet juices everywhere, and that incredible flavor. This seduction of the senses is very deliberate on the part of the peach. In fact, it's a matter of survival. Fruits are the seed-bearing ovaries of plants, and their mission is to spread these seeds. When fruits ripen, they become overwhelmingly desirable to animals (man included) so that animals will carry them off, eat them, and spread the seeds.

So how can you tell if a fruit is ripe? Unfortunately, most people don't have orchards and gardens full of fruit ripe for the picking. In fact most of the fruit we buy, at the grocery store anyway, has left the garden far behind, having been picked before its prime

to avoid shipping damage and storage loss.

All the more reason for us to understand the ripening process and learn some tricks for telling which fruit is ripe now and which will get ripe once you take it home from the market.

As fruits ripen, they go from hard, sour, inedible, near-invisible parts of the plant to stand-out, brilliant-colored, sweet, juicy objects with enticing aromas. They change in color, size, weight, texture, flavor, and aroma (some even produce ethylene gas); these varied attributes can be good indicators of ripeness.

Color is a clue, but not a reliable one. With some fruits, you can tell they're ripe by their color. As the acidity changes, the green chloro-

phyll breaks down. Some fruits like bananas and apples have bright colors underneath the green chlorophyll layer; the colors show through as the chlorophyll disappears. Other, like tomatoes, make their red-orange compound at the same time that the chlorophyll breaks down. Bluish-red berries become a deeper, more intense red as they ripen. For these fruits—bananas, apples, tomatoes, red berries, cherries—color change is an excellent indication of ripeness.

Use apples to ripen other fruits.
Ethylene gas from apples can encourage ripening in avocados, bananas, and cantaloupe.

Aroma hints strongly at flavor. Smell is especially important when color is not a good indicator of ripeness—for example, with most melons. Chemical changes take place in ripening fruits that cause them to produce sensuous, luscious-smelling volatile compounds.

Sniff the blossom end of the fruit (the end opposite the stem) and only select fruit that has a full, fruity aroma.

Which fruits ripen; which don't

Never ripen after picking	soft berries, cherries, citrus, grapes, litchis, olives, pineapple, watermelon
Ripen only after picking	avocados
Ripen in color, texture, and juiciness but not in sweetness after picking	apricots, blueberries, figs, melons (besides watermelon), nectarines, passionfruit, peaches, persimmons
Get sweeter after picking	apples, cherimoyas, kiwi, mangos, papayas, pears, sapotes, soursops
Ripen in every way after harvest	bananas

How to speed-ripen fruit

When some fruits ripen (bananas and apples especially) they give off ethylene gas, which further speeds ripening. In fact, produce shippers use ethylene to ripen certain fruit (or at least to get it to change color and look ripe) when it reaches its destination.

At home you can use ethylene to speed ripening. This method works especially well with tomatoes, avocados, bananas, and cantaloupe. First warm the fruit by setting it in a sunny window or microwave it for 15 seconds on medium power. Put it in a paper bag with a couple of ripe apples and close loosely. You want the ethylene concentrated in the bag, but you also want oxygen to get in to speed ripening.

Feel for a tender texture. As fruits ripen, the substances that hold the cells together (hemicelluloses and firm pectic substances) break down and convert to water-soluble pectins, which makes the fruit become softer and softer, so a gentle squeeze is a good test for ripeness. If a plum is rock hard, it isn't ripe. The squeeze test is especially useful with fruit that doesn't have a hard or thick rind, so squeeze stone fruit, pears, kiwis, and avocados. This doesn't work well with melons or pineapples, but even with these rough-coated fruits, a little give is a good sign.

Heavy is good. Weight can be a good indicator of ripe fruit. You'll often see the phrase "heavy for its size" as a

positive attribute for fruit. It generally means that the fruit is at least fully mature, which is a good start on the road to ripeness. A heavy tomato

grown, just-picked ripe fruit. Your local county extension agent can help you find growers and farmers' markets. And speak up to the produce man-

is a little depressing (you'll see that there are precious few fruits that get sweeter and improve in taste after picking), I find the chart very useful in gauging my chances of getting a piece of fruit that I'll actually want to eat.

Apples, pears, kiwis, and mangos all get sweeter after being picked.

or grapefruit, for example, is usually a good one.

If you have a grower nearby who allows you to pick your own or who's a conscientious producer who handles his produce well, by all means take advantage of that locally

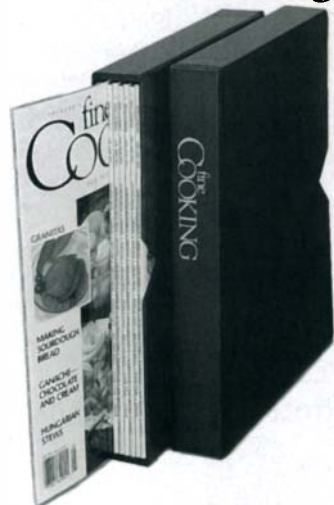
ager of your supermarket, too. Even big companies respond to consumer pressure.

The chart opposite, devised by food writer Jeffrey Steingarten, shows which fruits ripen at what stage. While the information

Shirley O. Corriher, a food scientist, is the author of Cook Wise (William Morrow, 1997), which recently won a James Beard award. She is a contributing editor to Fine Cooking. ♦



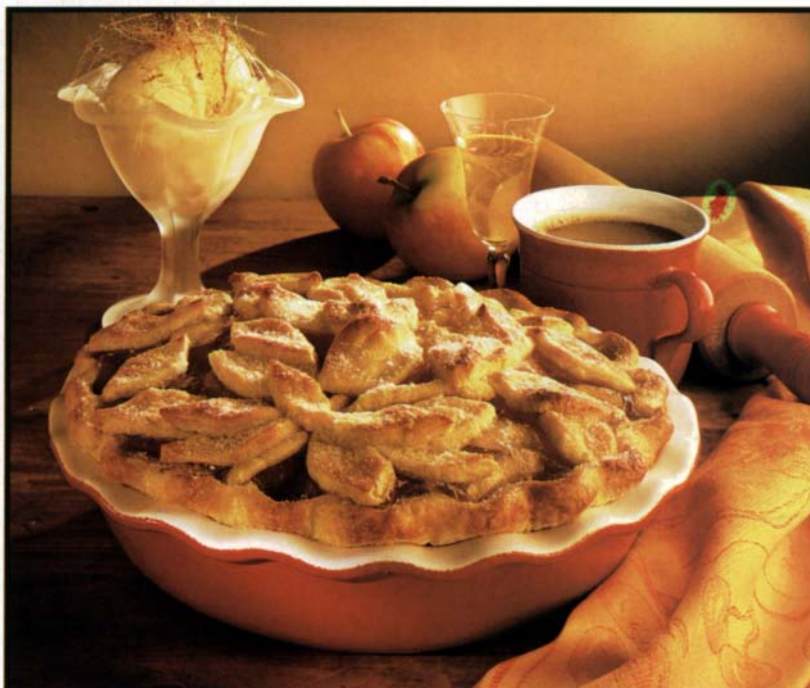
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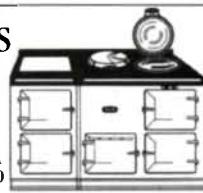
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- Pasta, preventing sogginess in soups 12
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NUTRITION INFORMATION

Recipe (analysis per serving)	Page	Calories		Protein (g)	Carb (g)	Fats (g)				Chol (mg)	Sodium (mg)	Fiber (g)	Notes
		total	from fat			total	sat	mono	poly				
Salmon Brochettes	32	590	390	46	2	44	6	26	9	125	780	1	
Lamb Brochettes	32	680	470	47	3	52	13	33	5	160	980	1	w/1 tsp. olive oil for coating meat
Moroccan-Spiced Chicken	33	490	340	35	2	38	6	26	4	95	290	1	
Barley & Black-Eyed Pea Salad	37	150	50	5	23	6	1	4	1	0	160	5	based on 8 servings
Lemon Rice Salad	37	110	25	2	19	3	0.5	2	0.5	0	5	1	per 1/2 cup
Tabbouleh with Roasted Tomatoes	38	260	180	5	20	20	3	13	3	0	420	5	based on 6 servings
Summer Wheatberry Salad	39	220	110	6	27	12	2	8	2	0	700	6	
Kansas City Style Ribs	42	1120	690	74	32	76	28	34	7	300	3240	1	per 1/3 slab ribs
Blueberry Shortcake	45	600	280	8	75	31	19	9	2	105	480	5	per shortcake
Mo J Flank Steak	52	440	330	24	5	36	8	25	3	60	660	1	
Grilled Tuna Steaks with Mango Mojo	52	330	110	38	11	12	2	8	2	80	430	1	
Grilled Shiitakes with Mojo Oriental	53	520	180	11	77	20	3	8	8	0	2110	5	
Twice-Baked Spinach Soufflés	62	380	270	15	14	30	17	9	2	260	590	3	per soufflé
Master Recipe for Velveting (in water)	65	140	25	24	2	2.5	1	1	0.5	65	560	0	based on 4 servings
Velveting Stir-Fry with Lemon Sauce	65	660	120	34	98	14	2	4	7	65	1350	6	with 1/2 cups rice
Fresh Fig Tart with Orange Custard	70	310	160	4	38	18	11	5	1	75	200	4	based on 8 servings
Fig & Anise Ice Cream	70	260	140	4	29	16	9	5	1	105	40	2	per 1/2 cup
Roasted Figs with Caramel	71	310	100	2	55	12	7	3	1	40	15	5	w/1/4 cup whipped cream
Fig Bars with Thyme	71	140	50	2	23	5	2.5	1.5	1	20	90	2	per 1 1/2-inch square
Pork Tenderloin Grilled in Rosemary	90	370	170	48	0	18	5	11	2	135	680	0	

The nutritional analyses have been calculated by a registered dietitian at The Food Consulting Company of San Diego, California. When a recipe gives a choice of ingredients, the first choice is the one used in

the calculations. Optional ingredients and those listed without a specific quantity are not included. When a range of ingredient amounts or servings is given, the smaller amount or portion is used.

Rosemary-Wrapped Pork Tenderloin, Ready to Grill in Minutes

Although marinades are generally an easy way to add flavor to grilled foods, they usually need time to work their magic. For a weeknight dinner, I don't always have the luxury of waiting a few hours while my dinner soaks in a marinade. To add a lot of flavor to pork tenderloin, I tie rosemary sprigs around it with kitchen twine (which is available in the grocery store) before grilling it. The fresh and strongly aromatic rosemary infuses the pork with its own flavor, and then a new flavor enters the equation when the rosemary starts smoking.

The amount of rosemary you'll need will depend on the length of the sprigs. If they're

very long, you can cut the sprigs in half to fit the tenderloin. If the sprigs are short, you may need to arrange a couple end to end to fit the length of the tenderloin. The powerful flavor of rosemary alone is enough to give you a flavorful dish, though you could also rub the meat with a cut garlic clove and brush it with mustard, or rub the meat with crushed juniper berries before tying on the rosemary. You could also try wrapping rosemary sprigs around a boneless turkey or chicken breast or even around a firm fish fillet.

I like my pork with a center that's still pink; this way the meat is juicy and tender. The USDA recommends cooking

pork to 160°F, but I take mine off the grill at about 150°F because the temperature will continue to rise for a few minutes off the grill.

As long as you have the grill going, why not grill some vegetables to go along with the meat? Try rubbing asparagus and scallions with olive oil and seasoning with salt and pepper; set them on the grill crosswise (so they don't fall through the grate) and grill until tender.

Clifford A. Wright often cooks quick and delicious meals for his three children in Santa Monica, California. His latest book is Italian Pure & Simple (William Morrow, 1998). ♦

Pork Tenderloin Grilled in Rosemary Leaves

I like to garnish this dish with a side of chopped ripe tomatoes tossed with good olive oil, salt, pepper, and fresh basil. These flavors are wonderful next to the rosemary-scented pork. *Serves four.*

2 lb. pork tenderloin
3 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil;
more as needed
Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste
10 to 20 fresh rosemary sprigs, depending on length

Rub the tenderloins (you'll probably have two for that amount of meat) all over with the olive oil and season with the salt and pepper. For each whole tenderloin, cut four 12-inch lengths of kitchen twine. Lay four of the strings horizontally on a work surface about 2 inches apart. Lay several sprigs of rosemary vertically on the strings. Set a tenderloin on top of the sprigs. Cover the tenderloin with several more sprigs. Wrap the twine around the pork and rosemary and tie so the rosemary is securely attached to the tenderloin; cut off any excess twine. Drizzle with a little more oil. Repeat with the other tenderloin.

Heat a gas grill to high or prepare a charcoal grill. Set the pork on the hot grill about 6 inches away from the heat. Cook uncovered, turning once, until the meat feels springy, not mushy, when squeezed (150° to 155°F) and the rosemary has darkened, 20 to 30 min. Take the pork off the grill; discard the rosemary and twine. Let the pork rest for a few minutes before you slice and serve.



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Anthony used to make the dough himself, but a booming business and bad knees prompted him to teach the craft to staff members. As the men work, salsa music from the portable radio somehow only emphasizes the silent, mesmerizing nature of their work—tossing, pulling, and stretching a flour-and-water dough until it's the size of a bedsheet and as thin as tissue paper.



Balls of dough, rolled to the size of a pizza, are rested and ready to be stretched.



That's not a bedsheet he's tossing—it's dough. The table, however, is lined with one of the muslin sheets hanging in the background. The fabric is sandwiched between each layer of dough to prevent sticking.



A huge bubble flattens as it's stretched. The men pull on the edges of the dough with the perfect balance of force and finesse. You can see the ragged edges of an already stretched sheet hanging below the table's edge.



Crisp, flaky layers of baked phyllo surround a savory cheese filling. Lily uses the dough with small tears for the shop's own pastries. The perfect pieces of dough are sold raw to patrons and chefs, who call Poseidon's phyllo simply the best.



Transparency is the goal. Once the dough dries, each large sheet is cut into about a dozen rectangles that get stacked like a sheaf of paper.